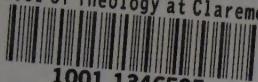


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THE
RELIGIOUS DIFFICULTIES
OF
CHILDREN

E. E. READ MUMFORD, M.A.



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Children

The Religious Difficulties of Children

By

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PREFACE.

This book is the outcome of difficulties in the religious life and thought of children, of which they were themselves conscious. It owes its existence to a monthly Correspondence Column, conducted in the "Sunday School Chronicle."

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INTRODUCTION

The answering of children's questions is indeed a difficult matter, demanding not only a large and deep experience, but an intimate knowledge of the working of the little questioners' minds. No subject is entirely outside their range. Eagerly they strive to pierce the mysteries of life and death, the problems of pain and suffering. They want to know "everything"—everything about the world of Nature, everything about God and His methods of working.

Their questionings bring us face to face with our own ignorance. Then we realise that we know so little. Compared with the wondering, questioning child, we must confess that we even *think* so little. And the little which we do know, or think we know, we find it hard to put into words which are suited to the child's comprehension.

The result is that we either confuse the children by our efforts to explain the abstract when they are capable only of picturing the concrete; or we put them off with answers whose superficiality would be evident to the children themselves, were they not by nature so trustful. At other times we put aside their questions altogether, telling them to wait till they are older and more capable of understanding, thus, in any case, post-

poning, and often permanently restricting, the very desire to know which at one time is so strong within them. The untruths and half answers, which we too often palm off on the children in answer to their questions, can have but one result—to sow in them a “harvest of future disillusionment.”

What, then, are we to do, more particularly with regard to the child’s religious training?

The foundations of his religious life are laid in the emotions he is capable of feeling in response to us long before he is old enough to benefit by definite religious teaching. If, then, we are really to help him, our own religion must needs be real—not a mere creed but a life—for teaching in the form of words only is worse than useless. Moreover, we must understand the child. The spirit of reverence, as essential to his religion as to ours, is in the first place “caught,” as it were, from us. Are we at all times truly reverent in those matters which are connected with the beginning of his religious life?

Gerald had had a grand romp after tea, and was full of frolic on his way to bed. Even his bath didn’t seem to quieten him, and the spirit of mischief was rampant! He was only three, and when bedtime came, he would not (or was it—could not?) kneel down quietly and reverently for his prayers. Nurse was vexed and punished him. Tears were shed, and then—though not before—

he knelt to pray. Was it a sin on his part not to manage to quieten down immediately prayer time came? Was it reverent on nurse's part to insist in that way? When he was younger he had sometimes refused to say his "grace" at meals, and had been removed weeping from the table till ready to repeat the bidden words. Had it been seemly thus to compel his communion with God?—for such is "grace" as well as prayers.

Bobbie was growing big enough to go to Church with his mother. He was just five, and he "wanted badly" to go. For a few Sundays, while all was strange and wonderful, he sat very still. But the strangeness soon wore off, and then he began to grow weary and to fidget. For this he was punished by having no cake for tea; and his little friend Molly, the same age as himself, who had committed the same dire offence, had to eat her Sunday tea in the nursery instead of joining her father and mother downstairs. Did punishment touch the heart of the matter? Would it help to develop in them a sense of reverence for sacred things?

Kate was nine years old. One day, with her brother's help, she tried to steal a pot of jam from the pantry shelf. Standing on a chair her foot slipped, and the jar fell on the floor and broke. Kate was whipped and sent to bed. She had jam for tea, jam for breakfast, jam for dinner—day after day, until she hated jam! And every night

she was required to read a special chapter out of the Bible calculated to impress upon her childish mind the terrible things which inevitably befell all those who stole! By the end of a week, she not only hated jam, and hated the aunt who had punished her—she hated the Bible too!

Do we understand the children? Do we realise the part we wish religious feeling to play in their lives when we deal with their shortcomings in this way? To what extent, and in what way, can church-going, Bible-reading, Sundays, and the saying of prayers or grace be made a "sober delight"? Is it reverential that they should be done as a duty only, whether felt to be pleasant or unpleasant? Can the use of force be justified in connection with any part of the child's religious life—if it is to be real?

It was Christmas Day, and the children were all gathered around the table, waiting for dinner. Father took up the carving knife to carve the turkey, and the little folk, watching him, were all astir with eager expectancy—when, suddenly, he thought he would improve the occasion by speaking to them for a few minutes about the special event which was being celebrated by the turkey that day! Solemnly he laid the knife down, and began to preach. The children's faces fell; the turkey was getting cold, and they were hungry—but father had judged that the purpose of the feast ought not to be forgotten in the enjoyment of it

—that “religion” must take the first place. So, one by one, he questioned the children, until even mother began to fidget. But in one little heart there was rebellion. When Nan was asked, “Do you know Who was born to-day, Nan?” she cried out, “I don’t know, daddy, and I don’t care! I want my dinner! When are you going to carve the turkey?” Father was shocked, and declared that Nan should have no dinner until she told him. She sat sullenly, refusing to reply, and when her father put her outside the room, she only kicked the door and screamed out, “I don’t care! I don’t care! I hate God! I love the devil! I do! I do! I do!” Her father had not understood impulsive, rebellious little Nan, who loved the Bible stories well—when she was told them at a suitable time.*

I am convinced that the methods so often used in training children in what we feel to be “religious duties” are by no means calculated to develop in them that feeling of reverence which is essential to all religion. Where, in the doing of any action, the inner motive is all-important, force can be no remedy, and our dealings with the child will be effectual only in so far as we understand him and he understands us. Somehow or other we must learn to put ourselves in the child’s place, to see with his eyes and feel with his

* This story is also given in “The Dawn of Character,” Chapter XIV., “The Child’s Point of View.”

feelings; and this is perhaps more necessary in connection with the child's prayers than in any other part of his religious life. Do we always take his prayers as seriously as we ought? Do we realise how closely his expectation of a definite answer to prayer is bound up with his childish belief in God? Are we always sincere with the children as regards prayer? What do we believe ourselves? And is that what we teach them?

Frances was six years old, a happy little soul, but for her great longing to have a baby brother or sister. Night after night her mother allowed her to pray to God to send a little baby, finally permitting her to write and post a letter addressed to "God in Heaven," the child hoping that a letter might reach Him though all her prayers had failed. And when, after waiting patiently, Frances got no answer, and neither letter nor baby came, the blow to her faith, child though she was, was so great that she ceased altogether from prayer. And all the time her mother had known that she herself had no desire to have another child; yet she had permitted her to pray in this manner!

Margaret and Joyce, one nine and the other seven, had been promised to go the very next day with their mother to town. As soon as they woke in the morning, full of expectation, they sprang out of bed, only to find that it was pouring with rain! Heavy-hearted, they were creeping back, when a thought struck Joyce. "Margaret," she

whispered, "shall we pray to gentle Jesus and ask Him to make it fine?" Quick as thought Margaret responded, and kneeling down side by side in perfect trust, the little ones sent up their petition, then once more they cuddled down under the bedclothes—but all disappointment had vanished, they knew it would be fine! It was fine. But had it kept on raining, would their faith have stood the test?

In spite of difficulties of this kind I believe it is so important to acquire the habit of prayer, that what we pray for is of secondary importance—as long as we continue to pray. But even so, can we help the children to understand when the answer they expect fails to come, for unless we succeed in this, in their disappointment, they may lose faith? How far do we ourselves understand? Have our own petitions always been answered in the way we expected? Have we carefully considered the matter? If not, can we expect to know what to say to the children when they are faced with the difficulty?

The attitude which the child takes in his prayers towards God is often bound up more closely than we realise with his whole attitude towards life, and this, all unconsciously, he has derived from us. Is there not a tendency, even on our own part, to be "always asking" when we speak to God? There is a place for petition in friendship, but should it take the first place? Should not love

imply beyond all else thanksgiving and service? Perhaps we are permitting the children to ask for too much from us and allowing them to do too little in return? If so, are we in this way indirectly encouraging them in a similar attitude towards God, their Heavenly Father? When Mary was six she used to pray, "Please help me to be good so that I can have more treats," and Charles was only a year younger when he objected that he did not see the use of a God if He didn't just *make* you good without your having yourself to take any trouble about it. But children differently trained are capable of taking a very different point of view. "I feel," said a boy of nine, in one of those moments of self-revelation which are rare even in childhood, "as if God was like a nurse or a mother. If you ask Him to make you good, you don't have to just ask Him and forget all about it and leave it to Him. You have to try your hardest—just as you have to try to do any hard job for yourself, and your nurse or your mother helps you to finish." And Norman was only five when he said, "When you ask God to help you to do anything, you have to try your very hardest yourself; then He does the last little bit you can't manage. If He did it all it would be spoilings."

This inability on our part to enter into the child's point of view also encourages in him a chaotic condition of thought in matters of theo-

logy, for the mind of the little child is capable only of realising concrete conceptions, and abstract truths are meaningless to him.

Frances, when she was five years old, had been told by her parents that "in God we live, and move, and have our being;" and then was overheard one day explaining to her younger brother that "God had a stomach ever so big—everything in the whole world was inside it."

Joyce was nearly four, when a friend, whom she had known somewhat intimately, died. Thinking about him one day, she said suddenly: "He is in this room, mother." Startled, her mother contradicted her; whereupon the child proceeded to argue. "Yes, he is. You told me he is with God, and you told me God is everywhere, so as he is with God, he must be in this room!"*

Jean was three years old, and a new "Nannie" had come, as she said, to "keep care of her." Shyly, yet confidently, she had conducted her round the house, showing all her treasures, indoors and out. As they passed through the large hall, her wee hand gripped her Nannie's more firmly. Pointing to a dark grating in one corner, she whispered, "Nannie, Jesus lives inside that dark hole."

Her quaint, childish logic was revealed for the first time to this new "Nannie" who had won her heart so quickly. She had been told that Jesus

* "Children's Sayings," by William Canton.

was "ever near her," though she could not see Him: this dark grating was the only place in her little world into which she could *not* see; hence behind this dark grating must be Jesus!

The child's relentless logic, combined with our insufficient teaching, produces indeed many a time "an odd patchwork of thought." For the most part, in our ignorance, we strive to plant in the child's mind ideas which he is not yet capable of receiving, and the result is confusion and unreality rather than any real understanding or any progressive expansion of the child's mind. The fact is that direct explanations on religious subjects are out of the question. If we wish to give the child any clear and adequate conceptions, we must seek to answer his questions indirectly through the telling of parable and of story, and through the religious interpretation of his own experience. In this way, and only in this way, can we clothe in a concrete—and therefore for the child, in an intelligible—form, the answer we wish to give.

"Why can't I hear God when He speaks, just like I hear you, father?" Lewis asked. "It says in the Bible that Samuel heard God call, but I've tried for ever so long, and I can't hear anything." He had been sitting quietly, all alone, in a far corner of the study.

Wondering how best to reply, and longing to help him, his father looked searchingly and lovingly at him. The little lad ran swiftly across the

room and climbed into his lap, and as he nestled down, his father knew the true answer to his question. "Why did you come to me, Lewis? I never called you," he said. Lewis crept closer. "I knew you wanted me, father; I just knew." And then his father told him that just as he knew his *earthly* father's thoughts without needing to hear his voice, so—when we love Him—we know our *Heavenly* Father's thoughts, and, in our hearts, hear His call; there is no need for words. And child though he was, he understood.

Maurice was only seven when he said: "We ask God about things when we pray, but we don't have to ask Him by speaking exactly; we ask Him in our hearts, and He tells us by a voice inside us, in our hearts. We can hear Him when we listen—and all the time He is speaking." And it was a little lad in the Sunday School who explained, in the course of a lesson on the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit: "We can't *see* Jesus, because He is in our hearts."*

Neville, when he was about five years old, on some particular occasion did not desire to be unselfish. He resisted all efforts made to get him to do the unselfish deed, and the matter was, for the time being, put aside. He was prone to ask questions on "big" subjects on all sorts of unlikely occasions; and in the middle of his bath, he suddenly inquired of his mother: "What is God's

* "Children's Sayings," by William Canton.

Spirit?" He was told that it was God's Spirit inside us that made us do good and loving actions, think good and loving thoughts; and not realising the possible connection with what had occurred in the nursery some little while before his bath time the explanation went on: "It is God's Spirit inside you that makes you act unselfishly when it is hard, that makes you tell the truth when you have done wrong: God's Spirit grows strong in you and you grow more like God every time you do right." It was a concrete explanation, and he understood. "I see," he answered; and he was quiet awhile. Then he said: "I want the good Spirit to grow strong in me; Marjorie may have that toy of mine I wouldn't let her play with."

Our explanation must be such that God is made increasingly real to the child, and this can only be if the child's early understanding of the Unseen is rooted and grounded in the daily experiences of life.

Why he cannot "see" God is often to the child a very real difficulty, and only in terms of a parable* are we able to suggest to him an explanation which is at once satisfying and true.

* After writing this story for the *Sunday School Chronicle*, it was suggested to me that the fact that the broom was itself *visible* detracted from the value of the story as suggesting an analogy to the Spirit of God. A fresh story was therefore written, in which *unseen* helpers—fairies, real enough to the children, though invisible—took the place of the Spirit of the Broom. This second story is told in "The Dawn of Religion in the Mind of the Child." (Longmans, 1/6 net).

Once upon a time, in a tiny village on the borders of the Black Forest, there lived a poor widow woman with her six children—Margaret, Franz, Peter, Gretchen, Hans and Norval. Margaret was the eldest—just eight years old—fair-haired and blue-eyed, quiet and thoughtful, her mother's chief helper. Then came Franz, a rollicking lad of seven; and mischief-loving Peter, fat and sturdy, just turned five. Gretchen was only three—fair-haired and blue-eyed like Margaret; but Margaret's curls were coaxed into two long plaits which hung demurely on either shoulder, and Gretchen's short, crisp curls framed her glad little face in a laughing cloud of glory. Norval and Hans, the twin babies, followed Gretchen. They were only eighteen months old, and their father had died soon after they were born; but, for all that, they had brought joy with them. No one knew one from the other. Both had brown eyes and fair curls, rosy cheeks, and a laugh like the ripple of running water which made you glad to hear.

With so many mouths to feed, it was often a hard struggle for the poor widow to make both ends meet, though in many ways the neighbours were kind and helpful; and Margaret, though not yet seven, had to take her mother's place in the home while she earned a little money, working in the village. But, even so, pennies were sometimes scarce; and, with all their care, often they had

neither enough to eat nor sufficient clothing for the wintry weather.

Naturally everything in the house had to be made to last as long as possible; yet the broom was undoubtedly wearing out.

Well used had that broom been day after day, for both Margaret and her mother liked to keep their little cottage neat and tidy; yet there was no doubt that another broom would be needed before very long. So, bit by bit, with great care, the pennies were saved and put by; and one day, when Franz counted up the money in the old stocking, he found that there was actually enough! It was a great day. Off they all trudged—mother with Norval, Margaret with Hans, Franz and Peter, and wee, toddling Gretchen—off to the market town.

The kindly shopman, himself a father, smiled at the little group as they all trooped in.

"A broom, little mother, ah! yes, I have the very broom! It has been waiting for you," and without delay, he fetched a strong, new broom from the little room behind the shop. "It's a wonderful broom, little mother," they heard him say. "Leave it in the kitchen at night when you go to bed, close the door, and—in the morning, see! . . . This broom is lent to such as you, little mother," and he smiled at the children clustering eagerly around her. "You can take back your pennies. You'll have some other use for

them. When that sober little Mädchen of yours is older, bring back the broom for someone else—that's all."

A magic broom! A magic broom in their little cottage! It was indeed a glad family that wended its way home that night.

And every night, grateful little Margaret put fresh flowers on the kitchen table—wild flowers gathered in the heart of the forest. Every night when they went to bed, the kitchen door was softly and reverently closed. And, in the night the fire was laid! the breakfast was put ready! the dust disappeared from floor and furniture! Yet, in the morning, the broom was always standing in the corner just where they had left it over night!

Year by year the busy mother grew older and frailer; year by year the children grew bigger and stronger and more helpful—and all the time the spirit of the broom did its work, and somehow shed a gladness over all.

None of them ever saw, or tried to see, who did the work; but their hearts went out in gratitude to the unseen friend—this spirit of the broom—to whom they owed so much.

"What is it to be a child?" asks Francis Thompson. "It is to be something very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism. It is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe

in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy-godmother in its soul."

And when the children ask "Why can't I see God?" the answer given long ago to Moses can be given to them still—"Though thou canst not see My face . . . I will make *My goodness* pass before thee."

"Seeing God"—we grown folk know—is not looking upon a Person, but an intense and thrilling consciousness that *God is manifest wherever in life we see the beautiful and the good*. And to this thought, the children, "pure in heart," instinctively respond.

Granted that the children have "caught" from us the spirit of love and reverence, they will readily understand, unless we all unknowingly confuse them by our efforts at direct explanation, by careless and insufficient answers; or even—and this is by no means uncommon—by the superficiality of many of our own conceptions—a superficiality so marked as to make them at times devoid of truth.

Do we grown folk sufficiently realise our own need for special preparation before we venture to teach religion to our children, or even to answer their questions? We mothers are many a time almost wholly absorbed in the physical needs of our

children, and can spare but little time for a close study of their moral or religious difficulties. Teachers are often busy planning out their lessons in accordance with the scheme laid down, busy about "method" in their schools; and, all unconsciously, many of them seem to lose sight of the individual child as a developing human being, reasoning and questioning, or who would be reasoning and questioning, if he were afforded sufficient opportunity.

Are we sufficiently alive to the need of self-criticism in our dealings with the children? Do we sufficiently realise, for instance, how desirable it is that they should ask questions? Do our older children question enough? Or do they receive the information we give them too readily, too uncritically? Do we perhaps teach them so dogmatically that we leave but little room for questioning? *Children ought to question about everything*—a living interest in any subject, whether it be the working of an aeroplane or religious teaching, necessitates questions. The curiosity which expresses itself in questions as soon as a child can speak is a fundamental instinct in the child's nature impelling him all unconsciously to prepare for a larger life, a life of freedom. Even the tiny infant, interested in the world around him, begins, in his indirect baby way, to question before he is five months old, contented no longer with being a mere passive spectator of life, but stretching out

his hands to grasp, to pull—in the unconscious effort to find out more about that wonderful world in which he lives! And as soon as that baby has learnt to speak, he begins to question in words. “Why?” and “What for?” at a certain stage of his development are hardly off his lips, for he “wants to know” about everything. Further and more elaborate questions follow quickly on the heels of the reasoning impulse which develops later. They express a demand for mental food. They are the outcome of intellectual craving.

As soon as the children begin to be interested in any particular person or subject, they of necessity begin to ponder and to question in their desire to know more, and, as parents and as teachers, it is our part so to teach that we *encourage* questioning. For a child’s questions not only reveal his interests, they show the general drift of his mind. They are straws showing the direction in which the stream of his thought is flowing—and they are an unconscious expression, not only of the child himself, but of the grown folk with whom he has been brought into contact, and under whose influence his ideas have been gradually formed.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF GOD.

"**I**S God a man, mother?" questioned a thoughtful little mite of four and a half years. "I thought He was a little boy."

After hearing about the baby Jesus, the same child asked: "Mother, now tell me about baby God."

Another little one asked: "Who made God, teacher?" a question by no means uncommon.

While a little boy, not yet out of the Infant School, said: "You only say prayers to an old man, and I am not going to." The teacher adds that this lad was in some ways unique, looked foreign, and seldom smiled like other children.

But, after all, was this little lad's remark, though expressed in a form which was unique, unique with regard to the difficulty which lay behind it? It is by no means uncommon for a child to have a conception of God so lacking in majesty that his prayers gradually become a meaningless formality, which are rejected by him altogether as a mere superstition as soon as he grows old enough to think for himself. I have been told more than once of children

who, for some strange reason, have actually pictured God as "a small pink person" in the sky. This crude childish conception had been so deeply rooted in the mind of one little one, that when, in middle life, she lay dying, and past thoughts welled up within her from the depths of her consciousness, she distinctly "saw" God imaged in this wise. Another child whom I knew told her mother that she always pictured God, when she prayed to Him at night, as "a pierrot with white cap and coat, with black bobs down the front." "I don't know why I see Him like that, Mother," she said, "is it very wicked of me?" And not infrequently God is so visaged that the child can ask in all seriousness, "Is there a Mrs. God?"

How are we to deal with these difficulties? Must not questions and conceptions such as these mean that the knowledge of his Heavenly Father which, after all, the child has gained in the long run from the teaching of the grown folk around him, has somehow failed to give him that sense of majesty and awe, that feeling of reverence, which should be associated, even in the mind of the tiny child, with things Divine?

The small child's imagination is keen, his reasoning powers are but little developed. Inevitably he projects his own feelings, his own experiences, into what he sees around him. For the most part the whole world is peopled for him with

gnomes and sprites, with elves and fairies; and God is in His dwelling-place above the clouds. But it is our part so to teach him that this manlike God is clothed with a glorious majesty. It is our part so to teach him that something of the sense of mystery bound up with God's love, with His infinitude, with His eternity, may be his, even in childhood. For us, God is the great Central Spirit of Love from Whom the love of all fathers and all mothers comes. For us, God is Infinite All-Being, unthinkable yet not unknowable, the Father and Mother Soul of the universe. *Somehow, for the child, too, God must infinitely transcend man.* And when we name Him to the children as "Our Father," we need at the same time to help them to understand that all our names for Him can be, at best, but symbols of a great Reality, which is beyond all naming—at best only a scale by which we seek to understand and to measure what is Infinite. We cannot tell them *what God is*; but we can tell them *what He is like*. God is like a father, like a mother, like a loving friend (and to some of the little ones in our poorer Sunday Schools, this is the only symbol which could appeal to them). But when we tell them this, we must tell them at the same time that God is infinitely greater than all.

In an article by Professor Adams on "The Use of Illustrations in the Sunday School," published in *The Sunday School Chronicle*, he drew

special attention to the care which we need to exercise when teaching the little ones about God through the medium of Bible stories. "You know the story in the Bible," he says, "of the importunate man who knocks at the door till the householder gives in. Often that is given, and reference is made to God. Now that is very bad, for whether you will or no, the children do think of God in connection with being in bed, and being comfortable. We need to be on our guard against that sort of thing." We must not "reduce God" through our representations "to the common level." He is greater than all—it is upon this point that again and again we should lay stress. Point to the snowdrops, watch the growth of an acorn—use as an illustration whatever wonder of Nature may come easiest to hand—then ask the little ones, could any father, or mother, or friend, however powerful, however clever, put an oak tree within the acorn, a snowdrop within the bulb? and could any father, or mother, or friend give life to that which has no life?

One night at bedtime, when Kathleen was six, she was talking with her mother. Her religious conceptions were still hazy, the thought of God and of Jesus were confused in her little mind, and life in the spirit world was unreal to this child, full of radiant health. "Why do we pray?" she questioned, "when God is dead? He died a long time ago." "Darling," her mother answered,

"how can God be dead, when such a little while ago He sent us baby?" For the moment, Kathleen was nonplussed, for she knew that babies came from God. "Well," she argued, "if He is living, He isn't as strong as the king, is He?" "He is stronger than the king, stronger than all of us," her mother replied. "Stronger than all of us?" the child marvelled. Then a sudden thought struck her—"Could God make that wardrobe?" The making of the wardrobe was even more wonderful to Kathleen than the sending of the babies, for the method of that making was more within her ken. Her mother paused for a moment: then, very quietly, she said: "The carpenter couldn't make the wardrobe, Kathleen, unless God made the trees grow, unless He gave the woodman the power to cut them down, and the men who made the tools the power to make them, and the carpenter the power to use those tools. We could none of us do anything unless God gave us the power." For a moment the child was very still, then, quietly and reverently, she lifted up her hand, and slowly moving one rosy finger to and fro, in a low voice she murmured, "And I could not move my little finger without God!" For a moment she lay there gazing at her finger, invested for the first time with a wonderful significance for her. Then, turning, "I would like to say my prayers," she said. With bowed head and folded hands she knelt, and voiced what was her first real prayer

to God. "Please, God, thank you for giving me the *power* to do things; thank you for giving me the *power* to walk about; thank you for giving me the *power* to love; thank you for giving mother the *power* to love me."

The consciousness of the majesty of God was finally brought home to Kathleen by the thought that none of us could do anything unless God gave us the power—and before a Power greater than any she had known, of her own accord, even the ultra-independent Kathleen bowed in reverence. The thought had sunk deeply into her child-mind. Night after night, for a long while after, she asked to pray herself; and the burden of her prayer always was "Thank you for the *power*"—once even remembering to thank God for the power "to do what mother had told her not to when mother wasn't there to see!"

To deepen the child's sense of wonder and awe by bringing him face to face with that in Nature which he knows to be absolutely beyond the power of any man—this, then, is the first thing we need to do. We need deliberately to cultivate a sense of wonder—not only in the child, but in ourselves—for children and grown folk alike draw nearer to the Great Beyond when they wonder, and the material world around is seen to be the Temple of the Most High.

But the little lad in the London Sunday School who refused to pray to "an old man" not only had

a limited conception of God as "a man," but, in consequence of this limited conception, he had refused to pray. Other children have done so before him. Kathleen had been nearly six before she first truly prayed. She was a sturdy little person, needing no one to "keep care of her," and not morally sensitive. The realisation of an unseen and loving Father aroused in her no instinctive response, and the thought of "God's voice within" did not appeal to her in the least! She would not, she declared, "be a copy cat of anything," not even of "a still, small voice!"

Norman, too, was just such another unemotional little person as Kathleen, but he had been taught from his earliest years to say his prayers regularly at his mother's knee. Mechanically, night after night, year after year, he had used the same form of words, ending up with the verse of a hymn, which the child repeated like some magic incantation—"Pity mice and plicity, Teach me, Lord, to come to Thee!" Then suddenly, on his eighth birthday, he had realised that these prayers of his meant nothing to him; and in spite of the distress of his parents, in spite of all their coaxing and arguing, he refused to say them any more! A week or so after he had ceased to pray, one day, when he was unusually good, his mother whispered to him: "Norman, I think you must have been asking God to help you, you have been so good to-day: haven't you, dear?" Poor anxious

soul! His prompt reply only made matters worse for her: "Oh no, Mother," he said, "I've done it every bit myself." Even though his mother, she could not understand a nature so different from her own. The child's attitude—independent, unimaginative, unemotional—was altogether foreign to her: and as she continued once again to urge the duty, and the necessity, of prayer, so, he, once again, as strenuously resisted. For the habit of meaningless prayer had for a time robbed him of all capacity for prayer: and to children such as these, mere form is abhorrent.

And this little Londoner, "not yet out of the Infant School," like Kathleen and Norman, was almost aggressively honest, and would not pray merely because he was told he ought to do so. Like these two, he was perhaps unduly wishful to fend for himself, dependent on no man; and prayer somehow made him conscious of his dependence. In his whole attitude to prayer he was mistaken—but that, again, was due, it is more than likely, to some false note struck in his very early teaching, possibly before he came to Sunday School at all. I am sure that the hardest part of Sunday School teaching must be, not the giving of right, as much as the supplanting of previously-given wrong impressions. Can we make such a child understand that prayer is not necessarily "asking"—not even asking to be made good, if "asking" isn't in one's line? Prayer is "communion" with an Unseen

Father ; " conversation with Him "—I use the word advisedly, in all reverence. All of us, whether big or little, even here profit by " conversation " with those whom we feel to be our superiors ; and even an independent lad like this one will know *some* friends whom he loves to talk to, who make him want to be good when he is in their presence. Will he not then be able to understand that when we come into the presence of the All-good, the All-loving, as we do in prayer, we cannot help growing better and more loving ourselves ?

A truer conception of prayer, a larger conception of God, is that which, first cultivating in ourselves, we want afterwards to give to the children. We can, I believe, only give it, with God's help, through our interpretation of Nature and of life.

To come back, then, to this particular difficulty. How ought we to deal with the little lad who announced in the Sunday School class that God was only a man, and to a man he was not going to pray ?

In the first place, we would wait till the others had gone before talking to him, for only in that way could we hope to discover what lay behind his daring statement. Then, our attitude towards him would naturally be sympathetic ; to feel vexed or shocked at his seeming irreverence would be wrong on our part, for he is as yet hardly old enough to be irreverent consciously, for irreverence

is the attitude of one who has once been reverent and has put aside his reverence. Alone with him, we could draw his attention to certain of the wonders or beauties of Nature which we knew to be within range of his experience. Could a *man* do so and so? we could ask, and in this way gradually lead him on to see that *his reason told him that God must be more than a man.*

Then, knowing that children learn best through their own self-activity, we might, the following Sunday, bring him some seeds and a little pot of earth in which he himself could plant them. In the growth of the seeds, he would come *first hand* into touch with the wonder of God's workings. We could suggest further that he should bring the little pot each Sunday to show to the other children, that they, too, with him, could watch the progress of growth—for one and all could learn afresh from the wondrous revelation. Then, without making him in any way aware of it, we could bear him specially in mind as we gave our lessons, in order that, through the Bible stories, through our interpretation of Life and of Nature, a knowledge of God might gradually be born within him.

If "he never smiles like the other children," perhaps he lacks love in his life; and Love is God.

If possible, then, we should get to know him outside the Sunday School, see him in his own home, ask him to tea—best of all, take him a country walk to help collect "specimens." Then

he will also learn, through us, that to have intercourse with (to commune with) an earthly teacher who loves him makes him happy, makes him want to be a better boy ; and he will be ready soon to understand that to have intercourse with (to commune with) a Heavenly Teacher, who is All-Love, makes him better too. Through the human he will come into contact with the Divine.

“ Flower from root,
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade,
In all our life.”

But all forcing is harmful, and, after all, there is no need for worry or for hurry. It lies in our power gradually to bring him to a knowledge of, and awaken in him a love for God ; for *within every child, in a greater or less degree, there is a natural response to spiritual influences.* And when he knows and loves, he will be ready himself to pray.

“ I am not a Sunday School teacher, but a day school teacher in an Infant School,” writes a correspondent, “ and frequently, in the Scripture lesson and the Nature talk, I am asked the question, ‘ Who made God ? ’ I tried to explain to one little girl how that God always had been, that He lived before the earth was made, and so on. My answer did not satisfy her. ‘ My mother can’t tell,’ she said, ‘ and now when I’ve asked you, you can’t.’ ”

But can we not "tell"? Is there no way in which we can suggest to the child a sufficient answer to her question? Can we not lead her, by a progressive analysis of her own concrete experience, gradually to discover for herself the difference between *God WHO IS, and all else which is "made"*—and will she not, then, begin to understand?

"What sort of things can you make yourself, dear?" we can ask—and when we have heard of the doll's clothes, and the paper mats, and the various little gifts prepared with pride and joy, we can lead her on to tell of the wonderful things which other people make—her mother in the home, her father in the workshop, the people in the factories. And then we can ask—"But *how* are all these things made? Mother makes your dresses, but must she not first have cloth? And the cloth comes from the warehouse; and the warehouses get it in huge bales from the woollen factory; and the wool is got from the sheep—and *men cannot 'make' sheep.*" In this way, first taking one instance and then another, step by step, we are able to lead the child to see for herself that it is always the same: that when we—men, women and little children—say that we have "made" anything, all we have really done is to "change" something else. We hew down living trees and saw the wood into planks, and these are "changed" into boxes and forms, into doors and window frames. We tend

and shear living sheep, and the wool is "changed" into cloth, and the cloth into clothes to wear, and curtains to keep out the cold in winter. Leading her on in this way, clearer and clearer gradually grows the thought in the child's mind, that every process of "making" into which we can enter, traced back to its beginning, brings us face to face with something in Nature which we *cannot* make—face to face with Life and Growth.

And then, once more, we can lead her back in thought to her own home, where everyone is busily "making" things for other people. *Why* does the child make presents for her friends, and clothes for her doll? Why does her mother make her clothes, and why is her father always "making" in the workshop? Is it not because of the love in all their hearts? And can we "make" this love? Or is that, too, something "given," just as Life was given?

The child knows; and out of her own experience, she will have found a concrete answer to her own question. Life and Love never can be "made"; they just ARE. God is the source of all Life; God is the Central Spirit of Love from Whom comes all our own power of loving; therefore He just IS. He was not "made."

What would God do if the sky fell down? was a question asked in the Sunday School by a little lad of five years old.

A direct or definite statement to the effect that the sky is not, as the child supposes, at the same time the ceiling of the earth and the floor of heaven—given by itself—would only undermine all his childish theories of God and Heaven; and, as the result of our explanations, “the last state” of that little lad would be worse, maybe, than “the first.”

Yet to pass his question over in the fear lest—in religious matters—we should further confuse him, is only to postpone the difficulty—and the longer he entertains false conceptions of this kind, the greater the shock when the time comes for him to discover that they are not true. Frequently I have been told by those who had thus visioned Heaven for the first eleven or twelve years of their life, that the shock in adolescence, when they first knew differently, was almost greater than their childish faith was able to withstand.

What, then, must we do? We must tell the child the truth; but, in the telling, strive to dwell upon the constructive rather than the destructive side of our reply—that is to say, we must lay stress upon the *fact* of the wondrous majesty of a God who could create so vast a universe, rather than upon the *fiction* of a material roof in the sky above. In this way, while indirectly we are able to correct his error, directly we should help to convey to him a deeper knowledge of God. The truth is so wonderful, so much more wonderful than his own

limited conceptions, that as the truth gradually dawns upon him, God should stand ever more fully revealed.

This, then, should be our aim ; but we grown folk need ourselves to "wonder" more ere we begin to tell ; lest, in the telling, we disrobe the facts of the garments woven by God's glory in which, for the child as for us, they ought to be clothed.

It is more difficult to write a definite answer to such a question as this when the child is absent than it is to speak one to the child when he is present, because, as we all know, the child's spiritual response helps to awaken within us thoughts which, before, we hardly knew to be ours. But I think that it is somewhat along these lines that I should seek to reply.

I should ask him first if he had ever seen the sea. If not, I should postpone answering his question until the following week, and would then first show him coloured pictures of the sea. Then, leading him on to tell me of its wonderful colouring, and asking him to pour out a little water in a tumbler, I should tell him the strange fact that, although a handful of sea water in one's hand is colourless, like the water in the glass, with the deep sea it is quite different. The sea gains its colour from its depth. That is the first point one would want him to realise, and the actual pouring out of

the water helps to rivet his attention, and impress the fact upon his little mind.

Then, next, letting him stretch up his arm to see if he could touch the ceiling as he stood, and then telling him to climb on to his chair to see if he could manage to touch it then, I should further draw his attention to the fact that, although he could not reach the ceiling, he was nearer to it when he climbed; and that he could actually touch it if he had a ladder long enough, or was able to climb to the top.

Yet—and this will be the wonderful fact to him—if he climbed to the top of the highest hill, he would be no nearer to the blue ceiling of the sky! Why? Because the sky wasn't a "ceiling" at all! Away and away, farther than one could fly if one had wings, farther than one could even think of flying, stretched the invisible air! Only, just as the depth of the sea gave colour to the colourless water, so the deep, deep air made the blueness of the sky! The stars, so far off that they looked like tiny specks of light, were really big "worlds," like this "world" of ours! The sun itself was a huge "world" of fire!

Then, after a few moments, slowly and quietly, without much detailed explanation, I would read to the boy part of the 104th Psalm.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, O Lord my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

"Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:

"Who layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds His chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

"Who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire:

"Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. . . .

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches."

"A child firmly believes that God answers all prayers," writes a teacher, "and in this spirit he prays for something he has heard his mother say she wants badly. It does not come, and the child's faith is somewhat shattered; how can he be made to understand?"

"This simple fact of demanding something which is genuinely wanted, and not getting it, has . . . been the undoing of many millions of small suppliants," writes the author of "The Twentieth Century Child." Then, if this be so, and there is no doubt that the problem arises constantly in our intercourse with the children, the question is one which demands our most urgent and close attention, in order that we may find some way by which we can help them to understand.

Ronald had prayed night after night for a toy yacht—a yacht which never came. He was four years old, “too young,” he guessed, “to be religious.” That was his conclusion, and none of the explanations offered to him by his mother were sufficiently satisfying to re-establish in him the habit of prayer.*

“If God can do everything,” questioned three-year-old Max, “can He make these blackberries ripe, and ready for us to eat, right now?” It was early summer, and the blackberries were still green. What is one to answer? How far could he have understood an Omnipotence, that yet worked within and behind an order of Nature, which, in our effort to explain, we call “law”? What if Max had added: “Shall I pray for the blackberries to be ripe now?” How far ought we to seek to direct a child’s askings in prayer lest he should so pray—those askings which are but the natural outcome of his simple trust in an all-loving and withal an all-powerful Father?

The question is a difficult one; and it would be a gain to many if those parents and teachers who read this could offer any suggestions as to the best method of dealing with it. The welding into one harmonious conception of a belief, on the one hand, in God’s Omnipotence, and, on the other, in the gradual working out of His laws in the matter of cause and effect, is not easy even for us

* “The Twentieth Century Child,” by E. H. Cooper.

grown folk ; and, in the end, our conclusion rests upon faith and inner experience rather than upon any reasoned argument. Gradually, as the outcome of that experience, we come to believe that we *know* certain things with regard to prayer—though we also know that, to another who thought differently to ourselves, we could not *prove* that knowledge of ours to be correct. For, in all probability, that knowledge has rested upon, and grown out of, that very habit of prayer which it afterwards justifies. We do not pray because we first believe in God ; we believe in God because we pray. It is as the result of prayer, in which the soul takes up a certain attitude towards God, that we come, bit by bit, to know more about Him.

And this I believe to be as true for the child as it is for us grown folk. By analogy, out of the contents of his own experience, we may be able to suggest to him a way out of his difficulties, but we can do no more than suggest ; we cannot adequately explain. The real answer can only be revealed to him very gradually as life goes on—as, taking up a certain attitude towards life, one by one he learns its lessons—as, taking up a certain attitude towards the Father, day by day He is ever increasingly revealed. “Now we know in part only ; but then we shall know, even as we are known.”

I have said that by analogy we may suggest an answer, for are not we, parents and teachers,

viewed from the standpoint of the child, to all intents and purposes, omnipotent? How easily—or so it must seem to the child—we can put our hands into our pockets and satisfy his every chance desire—if only we will! How easily we can alter the laws of the child's universe—postponing bedtimes, altering lesson times, regulating food, clothing, goings-out and comings-in, in accordance with what he himself desires—if only we will! And yet the child knows that we do not do this. We have the power, but we do not always use that power. And why? Because to give him what he wanted all the time would be, for him, what he soon learns to call “spoilings,” and, in the end, would not really add to his happiness! Because he knows that it would be a poor thing for him if we robbed him of all need for forethought, for endurance, for perseverance, by allowing him to get when he only asks for things, instead of working for them. Many a time when he is quite little he is sorely puzzled, and often even angry, at what seems like indifference towards his happiness on our part; but if we train him wisely, not for long. Simple truths such as these begin to dawn upon him very early in life, and as he grows older, he comes to see them with ever-increasing clearness. In his home life and in his life at school, it is a patent fact that we, who are in his sight practically omnipotent; we, by whom he knows he is loved; even we—just because we love him so much,

often refuse to satisfy his most urgent desires !

Slowly, then, as the result of experience, the child comes to understand, and so to take up a rightful attitude towards the father or the teacher who love him even when they deny him ; and all unconsciously, at the same time, he gradually takes up a rightful attitude to his Heavenly Father—his Heavenly Teacher. For now *he is able to understand how Love and Power can work together, each inhibiting the other for good.* And this knowledge will limit, though it will not forbid, his tendency to “ask for ” things. Slowly he has become conscious of the difference his love for us makes in his attitude towards us, understanding that even his *own* love, at times, necessarily puts a curb upon the expression to us of his personal desires: and the same thing which happens in his relationship to us happens in his relationship to God. Gradually his “askings ” in prayer begin to take on a different form. His prayer becomes the expression of his “Yes, Father,” rather than of a constant “Please, Father”—that is, he begins to express acquiescence in God’s will rather than a desire to change it in accordance with his own desires. He even wants now to give in return for all that has been given to him, rather than still to ask for more, and the endurance of love and trust become no longer dependent on the actual granting of his desires. “Please, God,” prayed seven-year-old Donald, “thank you for this lovely day, and for

all the happy days I've had before it. I thank you, dear Father. There's only one way that everybody, rich and poor, can thank you, and that is by being kind and good. We can all give you this present of being good, and so make your life happy because you make our lives happy."

Just as the child, who loves and trusts us, tells us at night, when he cuddles down in our lap, of the happy day that has passed, of the fun he is looking forward to on the morrow—tells us, too, spontaneously enough, of his childish troubles, of his childish needs, and yet is not ever "asking" us for more—so with the child who loves and trusts in God. His prayers are his "conversation" night and morning; his intercourse with his Heavenly Father, with Infinite Love, Infinite Holiness, and Infinite Power too; and, in his prayers, he should be unwilling, even were it possible, to "trade," as it were, on his knowledge of God's Omnipotence.

The explanation of apparently unanswered prayer is, then, to be sought, not in the region of theory, but in that of practice. It cannot be said too often, or put too strongly, that the child's attitude towards God depends more than all else upon his attitude towards us. It is our business to make him so sure of *our* unselfish love for him that it is impossible for him to doubt that love, except under the momentary stress of disappointed desire, *even when that love denies*: then, when God's Love denies, neither will it be possible for him ever to

doubt that Love. But too often we spoil the child's whole conception of fatherhood by the number of material gifts we offer him—and then wonder that his faith in God is so easily shaken to its foundations at the first shock of disappointment!

Need we, then, seek after all to direct the child's askings in prayer? This was the question with which we were faced at the outset. Not, I believe, if the child's attitude towards the Father is a right one. *Spontaneous "asking" is the natural outcome of childish love and trust. The "perfect love that casts out fear" not only permits, but—I dare to say—renders imperative a certain amount of petition.* And even though some of the child's petitions may be foolish (and are not ours often foolish too?)—even though some of his petitions may be at times morally mistaken (and are not ours that too?)—yet will not his Heavenly Father be able to discriminate—may I say it?—from among them, so that all that is good and true in those desires of his shall sooner or later come to pass for him? It is a rightful attitude towards God which makes all the difference in our conception of prayer, and in that of the child. Beyond us and within us are infinite resources upon which we can call—when, and perhaps only when—we trust in those resources, and are striving to mould our human will in unison with that of the Divine.

We grown folk, in teaching the children, tend,

I think, to lay undue stress upon the fact of Omnipotence compared with that of Wisdom and of Love, until there gradually emerges for the child, as the result of our teaching, a conception of God as a great Conjuror rather than that of an all-loving Father; and, maybe, if we only knew, prayer is more supremely and intensely natural than we oft-times realise. What we, in our inmost selves desire, that we end by becoming: it is God's law: and prayer is desire, winged upwards towards God.

"Ask and it shall be given you," said Christ—but we are to ask in Christ's Name, that is, in the spirit of the Master. Patience, faith, humble effort, obedience to the Father's will—all are demanded. "Oh Lord! now's your chance to make me good!"* Maurice was heard to say on one occasion, when he was shut up in a closet as a punishment—but Maurice, young as he was, could have understood that goodness would not be goodness if it could be poured into us, as it were, from on high. We have to do our hardest ourselves, with God's help, and He—in answer to our prayer—"He does the last little bit which we can't manage."

* "Children's Sayings," by William Canton.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF DEATH AND OF SUFFERING.

NOT infrequently, when the knowledge of death first enters into a child's life, it comes as a source of misery, or even of terror.

When Mary was quite young, her little cousin Ronald died. The child, who had been told nothing more than that he had "gone to Jesus in Heaven," afterwards saw him lying on his bed. What could she conclude other than that the "angels had not yet come to fetch him"? In her own special prayer she begged God not to send them for him just yet. But she was merely told not to use his name in her prayers any more! Her bewilderment was great, and when she saw the coffin carried away from the house and knew that Ronald had really gone—"Why buy a box," she said, "when the angels are taking Ronald to Jesus?" What a puzzle for the poor little mite! Why could she no longer talk to him naturally in her prayers? If he were with Jesus, could he not hear her? The more she thought about it, the more puzzled she grew. Night after night she used to

get up out of bed and sit by the window, watching the stars, which, to her, were the Gates of Heaven, wondering through which window her little cousin was looking back at her—the little cousin to whom, for some strange reason, she might no longer speak.

Marjorie was six years old when her mother died, the mother who had taught her that God was Love, that God loved her far better than her father, or her mother, or anyone else she knew. Yet God had taken that mother away from her! Why? Oh, why? echoed and re-echoed in the child's mind. "If God really knew what Love was, He could never have taken her from them and have left them all to be so sad," was her unspoken thought—and for a long time the child never could believe that God was "anything but a very unkind man to send such a sorrow to anyone."

Neither in Mary's case, nor in Marjorie's, had any special effort been made on the part of the grown folk around to understand the child's point of view, or to give them a beautiful and true conception of what death was. And yet children, so open minded, are wonderfully ready to receive such a conception. They can understand that when people are old, or sick, or in pain, they are tired and long to rest; and the good God loves them so much that He then puts them gently to sleep. They know for themselves, in their own experience, the sense of comfort which comes to them at night, when, wearied with the work and

fun in the day, they lie down for sleep. Yet there is a difference which oftentimes troubles them, for they wake in the morning in the same room and refreshed, while those who die, as they soon discover, leave their sleeping bodies here on earth to be buried under the soil. Yet without difficulty the children can grasp the thought that the *body* is not the *person*; that though the body is worn out and people are thankful to lay it aside, the spirit can still live. The thought of the spirit apart from the body is easily grasped by the child-mind. They know that when they love us and long to do something to show that love, it isn't their *bodies* which are loving and longing, but something inside them, some "inner part which they don't understand" as a child has expressed it: and it is that inner part, the real self, the spirit, we can tell them, which lives on with God.

Life is puzzling many a time to the grown folk; it can but be puzzling to the children. But there are certain conceptions of life and of God which help us to trust in the darkness; and with these we can help them. We can make it a beautiful thought to the child that the loved one has only gone to God because he was too tired to work here any more, and that he can, and does, love and watch over him still.

But whatever we tell the children they will test by their own limited experience, with the strict impartiality perhaps only possible in child-

hood, for "the intelligent, thoughtful child has not become habituated to the watertight compartment arrangement, in which there is no possibility of a leakage of ideas from one group into another." We need to enter far more intimately than we do into the child's point of view, or we shall find ourselves grievously at sea.

Bobbie was an only child, a keen, affectionate little lad. He was very fond of going to stay with an aunt whom he knew had once had a little boy of her own, but who had died when he was quite young. One day, when he was with her, he was sitting in a thoughtful mood, and something directed his thought towards his little cousin. "When did Arnold die, Auntie?" he asked. Softly she answered him, "Many years ago, laddie; he was six years old, a big boy like you, when God took him." "But why did God take him, Auntie?" he persisted wistfully, troubled by a new sense of his favourite auntie's loss. "God wanted him, dear," she said; "He wanted him more than Auntie did, and so He took him." It is an answer often given to a child. For a moment he looked at her and the tears welled up in his big, brown eyes; then, all at once, he broke out passionately, "Then He's a wicked, selfish God, and I hate Him, to take your only little boy when He had lots!" It was an honest and a natural criticism. An answer like that given to Bobbie may do incalculable harm—and do we, when we give it, really

believe it ourselves? If so, why do we strive, with all the means at our disposal, to keep our loved one here if we believe that God *wants* him above? If the child's religion is to be real, it must be a true interpretation of his own life's experience. Both Mary and Marjorie could have been helped to understand, and Bobbie's fierce denunciation would never have been called forth if a different reply had been forthcoming—"Arnold was tired and suffering, dear; God was sorry, and so He took him."

In a book—"The Sensitive Child"—by Mrs. Kate Whiting Patch, the child's fear of death is dealt with in an exquisitely tender manner. Into this child's life—so she tells us—the experience of Death had come early, for one sunshiny morning, lying on the ground in the garden, he had found three little still birds. Hurriedly he had sought his mother and brought her back with him. "We will bury them here in the garden," she had said. "The wee birdies will not need these bodies any more:" and he had watched her as she had put them tenderly under the ground. Then, all at once, the shadow of fear had fallen on him. "O mother," he said, with a little shiver, "I'm so glad *we* don't have to die." Quietly, then, she had told him that we must all some time leave our bodies here; only, when that time came, we should no longer need them. He had hardly understood;

perhaps, in his trouble, he had only half heard—but the birdies' funeral was soon over, and in a little while he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

And then, not long after, the Angel of Death had drawn nearer to him; for a dear old friend of his, Mr. Greatheart, passed away. His little soul seemed then suddenly to stand face to face with something large and terrible, and his thought flashed back to the wee cold birds in the garden. Did this thing come to human creatures too? Might it come to him—to those he loved?

In vain his mother sought to comfort him. Not even the thought that Mr. Greatheart had been old and sick and suffering so that he was happier away, could ease his burden. All too vividly he remembered the tiny birds, and the thought that the bodies of people were put under the earth, like those of the birds, frightened him.

"But"—his mother tried to show him—"it is not *we* who are put in the ground; *we* are not our *bodies*, darling. Why, little boy," she went on, "our bodies are like houses. We just live in them while we are here in the world, and our eyes are the windows through which we look. When we have finished with living, we shall not want these house bodies any more, and they will be put away in the earth, and we shall go to our Heavenly Father." It all seemed so clear to the mother, but the child was still puzzled and troubled. "How

does Mr. Greatheart look now?" he questioned. "How did he get out of his body? Did someone cut him out? Will he mind going under the earth?" Question after question he asked, and his mother tried to answer; but "the shadow still lay deep in the child's eyes."

Then, sorely troubled for her Sensitive Child, she fell back on the familiar symbol of the butterfly, hoping that it might help him.

"Little boy," she said, "Don't you remember the fuzzy caterpillar we watched; how he went to sleep and hung there in his chrysalis on the dry twig so very long that there seemed no life in him? And then you remember the wonderful day that you and sister found him stirring; how we watched him break away from his little brown prison, and slowly unfurl his beautiful, wonderful, new wings, and at last fly away? It was the same caterpillar, only he had grown, and changed, and left his old body behind him. He did not have to crawl on the earth any more—he could fly!"

And then she went on to tell him eagerly how we too were changed when we left our worn-out bodies here. "Yes, but I want the caterpillar too," he cried, with a pathetic tremble in his little voice.

Do children ever die? Do you have to be old yourself before you die? Was his mother old now? Was his father? These were the thoughts that, day after day, still troubled him. And one

night his mother heard him crying quietly after she had tucked him up in bed. It was the old, old trouble haunting him still. "Oh, mother," he sobbed, "I don't want to be put into the ground when I die!"

What could his mother say? About and within she looked for help, and then, and not till then, did the right answer come—an answer so simple, so natural, that it seemed strange that it should not have occurred to her before. In a flash of insight, she saw that her Sensitive Child, for all his sensitiveness, which at times made him seem so wise, was after all but a little frightened child, "in need of the everyday helps and symbols." Her glance fell on the chair, where lay the little suit he had been wearing that day.

"Little boy," she said, "do you see that suit of clothes?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, if you and I should go out in the garden and dig a hole and bury the suit, do you think it would care? Do you think the little trousers and blouse would mind?"

"Why, no," he agreed, almost laughing.

"Of course they would not," said the mother, "and it would be the same with you. When our Heavenly Father gives you a new body, you won't be in this one, and your old body will not mind being laid in the earth any more than the clothes would mind. It will be just like an old suit that

you have laid aside because you did not need it any more."

At last the little boy understood and lay back on his pillow with a happy sigh, for the mother had succeeded in helping the child to share her own faith. The morbid cloud had lifted. The Angel of Death was still a mystery, yet there was light now upon his wings, and for the little boy the coming and going of all life gradually took its place in the universe. Familiar people went away out of his sight, but he no longer questioned their going.

Sunday School teaching should be something more than mere instruction in the New and Old Testament. There should be an intimate personal relationship between the teacher and the scholar which is akin to that which exists between the mother and child. Where such relationship exists, the teacher is necessarily brought face to face many a time with the child's difficulties, and needs to understand. Not all children are troubled by the thought of death as was this "Sensitive Child:" on many a little one the shadow of fear but rarely seems to fall. But there are always many sensitive ones in our midst; and it is they, above all others, who are in need of a tender and sympathetic understanding, by the teacher in the school as well as by the parent in the home.

In that long last sleep, and in the burial of the dear body, there must be grief; but there

should be no element of fear or dread. Death should be but a "passing" from one room to another in the Father's House.

"I have a little niece of four and a half years old," writes a Sunday School teacher, "a highly strung, sensitive child. She attends Sunday School, and is in my Primary Department. . . . It has rather perplexed me to note how her childish mind is at times troubled with anxious thoughts of death and the mystery of God. The first time, I think, that she became conscious that there was such a thing as death was some months ago, when—seeing some blinds down, and hearing her elders refer to a lady who had passed away—she began to ask questions on the subject: 'What was dying? Would mother die? Must mother die?' Her mother tried to show her that it was not really we ourselves that died, only our bodies died, our souls lived: but the child replied, 'Oh, mother, I don't want my body to die! If my body died, there would only be my head and legs left!'"*

"So it would seem," continues my correspondent, "that by direct explanation the child was more confused at the end than at the beginning.

"Some months passed, and little or nothing was said on the subject, till, only last week, when away on a holiday together, I, one day, remarked:

* See "Children's Way," by Professor Sully, for the frequency of this conception in little children.

‘When you come home, you will come again to Auntie’s Sunday School, won’t you?’ Her unexpected answer was: ‘Yes, but I don’t want to die! Shall we die, Auntie? When will we die?’ Taken by surprise, I was silent a moment, and the child eagerly demanded, ‘Shall we die, Auntie, shall we?’ Seeing the look of fear in her baby eyes, I replied: ‘What makes you think of such things, Mary? Who has been talking about them to you?’ She answered simply—‘My sister.’ This sister, by the way, is an imaginary companion, as the child has no sister, but only two brothers, and her reply was probably due to the fact that, not being able to trace the circumstances which had brought the thought of death to her mind, this seemed the most satisfactory way out of the difficulty.

“The book—‘The Sensitive Child’—lay at hand. I picked it up and said: ‘I will tell you about a little boy of four years old who thought and felt just like you do, who was afraid, just as you are.’ And I told her of the little velvet suit of clothes, etc., when, to my relief, the smile returned to her face once more. I then went on to read some of the ‘Sensitive Child’s’ poetry, in which she was interested, and, for the time at any rate, the fearful haunting thoughts were banished.”

But what if death comes suddenly and unexpectedly, writes another teacher, without pre-

vious suffering? For instance, what can you say to a child who has lost his father through death caused by an accident? Death was instantaneous. He was not old, nor in pain, nor trouble. Why should God take the bread-winner before he had become old or ill?

May I, in suggesting an answer to this question, keep still to the homely illustration which every child is able to understand? What if one day, in spite of all precautions, a favourite suit, neither outworn nor outgrown, met with an accident of such a kind that the suit could not be repaired, and before the natural lease of its life was ended, it had to be put away? The child might be overcome with distress—we should be sorry too—but what would be our attitude, and what attitude should we encourage in the child?

“It seems to me,” a child philosopher once said, “as if God was like a Father Who had sent us away from Him for a time because He wanted us to learn a lesson”—and with the deep, unconscious insight of childhood, he spoke a truth greater than he knew.

Under such circumstances, should we not say to the child: “Dear, your suit is quite spoiled, and however hard we try, we cannot make it fit to wear again. Then don’t let us make a fuss about it! Bear the loss of the suit like a man!”

And is not this the right attitude for all of us, children and grown folk alike, towards *all* troubles,

whether great or small? Even if the beloved father, who is also the breadwinner, meets with an accident, ought not our attitude to be the same? We cannot lessen our trouble by sitting down and bemoaning our loss. Ought we not, in the face of the heaviest adversities, to strive to endure bravely, to *win* something—even out of overwhelming grief such as this? And cannot even the little child enter, to some extent, into this point of view? And will he, too, not find comfort in so doing?

From the sad things, as from the glad things, in life, *God wants us to learn something*—we can tell the child that. If he, for the sake of the father who has gone, for the sake of the lonely mother who is left behind, keeps the hasty word from his lips and the frown from his brow; freely and gladly does his part in the numberless duties in which even the little child can take a share; if he shows a tenderer love, a more kindly consideration, to all around—why, then he will find, and his mother will find too, that sorrow begins to be robbed of its bitterness, and that, in the special showing forth of love because of the grief, a new joy—at once tender and pathetic—takes root within the home. Again and yet again, in little things and in big, if we will, we can help the children to make the discovery that *it is our attitude towards life which makes all the difference in its liveableness, which helps to explain away its difficulties, which transforms all the troubles we are called upon to face.*

Did you tackle the trouble that came your way,
 With a resolute smile and cheerful?
 Or hide your face from the light of day,
 With a craven soul and fearful;
 Oh, a trouble's a ton or a trouble's an ounce,
 Or a trouble is what you make it,
 And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts,
 But only—how did you take it?
 You are beaten to earth? Well, what of that?
 Come up with a smiling face.
 It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
 But to lie there—that's disgrace.
 The harder you're thrown, why, the higher you'll
 bounce!
 Be proud of your blackened eye!
 It isn't the fact that you're hit that counts,
 It's how did you fight—and why?

In the discipline of life, strength of character
 can be won, and understanding and sympathy born.
 I know a family in which, as the eldest daughter
 once said, there was "no time for tenderness," until
 the youngest brother—a lad of sixteen—met with
 a sudden and tragic death. It was trouble which
 first brought them near to one another.

"When a father is taken in the prime of life,"
 writes my correspondent, "it is more difficult still
 to explain the reason to children."

But if, for the one who has gone, death is but

a "passing over"; if, for those who are left behind, the brave endurance of trouble helps them to "rise to higher things," need we try to *explain*? Have we not cause ourselves to "trust the Pilot"? And can we not, through sympathy, communicate that trust of ours to the child? Is it possible that a sorrow such as this may only seem to us to need "explanation" because we have an exaggerated fear of death; because we do not persistently cultivate, in little things as in big, that attitude of mind which *accepts the sorrow which is inevitable as God-given opportunity*?

Again and again we grown folk make the discovery that in seeking to interpret Life in terms of Love for the sake of the children, we find, at the same time for ourselves, an answer to the world-riddle.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROBLEM OF PRAYER.

“**I**’M bothered, Mother, about my prayers,” said a girl of eleven years old. “Sometimes I forget all about them in the morning or at night, and sometimes I’m in such a hurry I know I don’t say them properly. What can I do to help it?”

This chapter is concerned not with any question in theology, but with the simple, practical difficulty, of which many of us are conscious equally with this child, of finding time for prayer.

The child was conscious of the fact, as we ourselves often are, that her heart was not always in the words she said. In the morning there was so much to think about—her books to be got ready in time for school, her bedroom to be left tidy and so forth—and it was hard to detach herself (this was the child’s thought, though not, of course, her words) from her immediate surroundings and really to “talk ” with God as with a Father. In the evening, at the end of a day full to the brim with work and play, she was tired and incapable of the imaginative effort which is required in all real

prayer, the giving out of oneself in thought without which prayer is but a form of words. And the child was worried because, although she prayed outwardly, she knew that she did not *really* pray, and she knew also that she was missing something out of her life—missing the God-given “help to be good” which would otherwise, through prayer, have been hers.

I believe that thoughtful children, as they grow older, are often faced with this difficulty—for, being thoughtful, they cannot be altogether content with the more or less purely verbal repetition which satisfies those who are less thoughtful—yet, as children, their power of thought-control is limited and they are only capable of putting forth a limited amount of effort in any one day.

Do we grown folk, in the first place, sufficiently realise this difficulty? And if so, how can we help the children to meet it?

Under certain circumstances, before you can get any water *out* of a pump, you have first to put a little *in*. Until you have done so, you can work as persistently and energetically as you like, and you get no result. But when you have, so to speak, done your part; then, fully and freely, Nature responds.

And this is true of every aspect of religious life—of our own and of the children’s.

“*Ask*, and it will be given to you; *seek*, and you will find; *knock*, and the door will be opened

to you. For it is always *he who asks* that receives ; *he who seeks* that finds, and *he who knocks* that has the door opened to him." Prayer is not merely an attitude of the soul ; it is a spiritual *action*, a form of *work* ; some effort is demanded.

Yet the child is, as I have said, only capable of putting forth a limited amount of effort, and her capacity in this direction is already overtaxed by a multiplicity of duties. This is the problem we are called upon to face and here and everywhere, it is in the heart of our own everyday experience that we must seek for a solution. Do we not know, in our relationships with those among whom we live, that although all true intercourse demands effort, when such intercourse is prompted by love, all consciousness of effort passes away in a feeling of gladness and of spontaneity ? Not only this, but we know further that within certain limits, not further exhaustion, but actual refreshment, is the result of the effort expended.* Then if this be true of our relationships with men and women, will it not be true also of our relationship with God ? And if so, is not the supreme need to awaken and develop

* As an illustration of this fact, I would like to tell of the experience of an earnest, hard-working clergyman in one of the slums of Manchester. He had been up the whole night with a sick man, and only left him in the morning to administer early Communion. He felt weary beyond description on his way to church—it had been an all-night battle with death—yet after the service, he felt like a new man ! Effort had been expended, but in love, and the Divine love had renewed his strength.

love as a prelude to, and accompaniment of, prayer?

Love awakes when the child realises that everything which makes him happy he owes to God—the sunshine, the flowers, the trees, the pleasures of home and of school—the very power to enjoy, to love, to know and to do, which he possesses.

Love grows with the growth of this knowledge; as every source of joy which finds a loving response within his child-heart, step by step, he learns to associate with God.

And love grows stronger still when he begins to express the gratitude which he feels; to express it, not only in words in prayer, but in whole-hearted service, service which now he renders consciously to God as the outcome of his love for God. Love towards man grows by what it gives more than by what it receives; and love towards God follows the same law. Moreover, in so far as service is consciously rendered, the thought of the one served is, of necessity, clearly and frequently present in the child's mind, and, as a consequence, the sense of personal relationship within the child grows and deepens.

But love ceases to grow apart from service, apart from constant thought. Do we realise this for the child—do we perhaps realise it for ourselves—sufficiently? Can love towards God grow if all that is consciously given—I want to lay great stress upon the word consciously—is prayer twice a day?

And if it does not grow, will it not of necessity lessen, for "standing still" is contrary to Nature, whether in the physical, mental, moral or spiritual world? And with its lessening, must there not arise, also of necessity, an added consciousness of effort in connection with spiritual things? and does not prayer under such circumstances inevitably tend to become formal?

The solution of the problem lies in the cultivation of love through service and through prayer. This, with our help, the child can understand.

"You say you find it hard, dear, to talk to God in the morning because you are busy, and at night because you are tired, but however busy you are in the morning" (we can ask her), "you are glad, aren't you, to talk with *Mother* for a few minutes? You are never too busy for that. And after the talk, doesn't the work somehow seem easier, so that it gets done more quickly? How ever tired you are at night too, doesn't a talk with *Mother* somehow freshen you?

"Why do you suppose it makes a difference like that to you? If you went to her, night and morning, *only as a duty, because you had been taught to go*, and never went to her at any other time during the day, do you think the 'going' would help you then in the way it does now?"

Then, leading her on to talk about prayer, suggest to her that prayer is just talk—conversation

—with God, and suggest further the thought that all real talk, like the talks she often has with her mother, are like prayers too, and help her in much the same way as real prayer to God helps her; only the talk must be “real”—that is the essential thing. Get her to concentrate a little on this thought. What is the difference between a “real” talk, and any other talk, which is just a form of words with “no heart” in it? Has she ever heard the expression being “in touch” with anyone? To be “in touch” must mean somehow being very near; for nothing can stand between two things just where they touch. What can the words mean, then, when they are used about people? What is the difference between being “in touch” and “out of touch” with anybody? When you are “out of touch,” isn’t it an effort to “tell things”? And even when you make yourself tell are you made stronger, better, for the telling? Help her to realise that it isn’t possible to be really forgiven for wrong-doing by anyone with whom we are “out of touch,” because forgiveness does not mean hearing certain words spoken or being let off a punishment—it means a changed feeling within us, a sense of union with the person who has forgiven us, higher desires somehow caught from them. And all this is only possible where there is close affection and sympathy. Gradually, in some such way as this, we can lead the child increasingly to understand that even

motherhood cannot be the same when mother and child for some reason are "out of touch" with one another, so that if, failing to respond to her mother's love, she has grown "out of touch" with her, she needs to work hard to get "into touch" again before their talks can again become real and helpful ones. Then the question is how to get back "into touch." And the child knows that it must mean conscious, deliberate and persistent effort on her part. She will need to think more often of her mother, to care for her more, to put her mother's wishes before her own, to try consciously, day by day, to be the sort of little person her mother wants her to be. To get back "into touch" will necessitate constant loving thought and conscious service; but there is no other way by which she can learn the real value of having a mother, the real value of intercourse with that mother.

Neither is there any other way of finding out what it means to have a Father in Heaven and what it means to pray.

The child needs God. Mother is not, and cannot, be always with her; but God is there always. Only—God's help, God's forgiveness, even God's power to make her good and strong, are, equally with her mother's, dependent on her own power to respond. She must herself make the deliberate initial efforts which bring her "into touch" with God, just as she would need to make

a deliberate initial effort to get back "into touch" with her own mother. God must be remembered, thanked, worked for, cared for, other than in night and morning prayers.

"In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him," writes Brother Lawrence, "we must at first apply to Him with some diligence, but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly incite us to it without any difficulty. . . . That we ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs, just as they happen. That God never failed to grant it, as he had often experienced."

Brother Lawrence's was a simple faith, yet is it not justified by experience?

Perhaps the child can travel along this road more easily than we grown folk, for his faith is more simple, more natural, more spontaneous than ours. But in the "Practice of the Presence of God," would not the problem of prayer be solved?

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHILD AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

A LONG what lines can we attempt to explain to a little child the mystery of the Holy Trinity? That is the task which, in reply to a teacher's question, I have set for myself in this chapter, a task which I only undertake with a deep sense of my own inefficiency and a vivid realisation that any suggestions which I may offer can be, at their best, but tentative and partial solutions of the problem. Yet, striving to see as the child sees, if we can but lift the veriest corner of the veil which shrouds one of the greatest of all mysteries, is it not well that we should try?

In the solution of most of our religious difficulties there are, I believe, certain broad fundamental principles upon which our inquiry should, as far as possible, be based. These I shall first enunciate and explain, and then apply.

The first, to which I have repeatedly made reference, is that only by means of the known can we approach to a knowledge of the unknown

The second, closely bound up with, if not actually dependent upon, the first, is that all doctrine is fundamentally a matter of experience.

The third is that, although religious doctrine is fundamentally a matter of experience, the experience itself is of necessity greater than the doctrine, for language, even at its best, is always an imperfect instrument of expression.

The fourth, no less important—from some points of view of even greater importance than the other three—is that just as language, even at its best, is an imperfect instrument by which to tell of human experience, so human experience, even at its best, is only a limited expression of Divine Reality. Although religious doctrine, then, is based upon experience in its essential truth, it infinitely transcends it, for the finite cannot contain the infinite, neither can the human comprehend the Divine, though it may apprehend some portion of it.

Before, however, discussing the application of these principles to the special question of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, I should like, by a single concrete illustration, to press home their truth, because I believe that the crude presentations of doctrine which one sometimes comes across, and which can and do serve only to confuse and alienate the more thoughtful child, would naturally and spontaneously be transformed into something truer—truer, that is, to our own moral and spiritual experiences, which surely are of God—if only these principles were sufficiently clearly grasped to be fearlessly and reverently applied.

The well-spring of love in his mother's heart is "unknown" to a tiny child, but day by day as he comes gradually to know all that she does for him, to realise all that she is to him, through that which he knows, bit by bit, that which was at first unknown is ever increasingly revealed. This, in our human experience, is a universal truth. The unknown can only become known in and through that which is already known.

And when, a little later, the child stoutly declares, "I *know* my mother loves me—heaps and heaps!"—when, as wee Ronald used to do, he runs to her when hurt, for a touch of "her healing hand," declaring that "he *knows*" mother can make him all right, he is only expressing in speech and in action a belief which is the result of his own experience of his mother's love and of her power to heal. This also is universally true. Belief—and doctrine is but a statement of a belief—is the outcome of experience: it is based upon an actual "knowing."

But the little child knows, though he could not put it into words, that any mere "statement" of his love, however vehement, is inadequate, and at times with a glad cry he strives to atone for this inadequacy of speech by a swift and eager embrace. The real thing, the love that lies behind his speech; the real thing, the love which he feels so intensely within himself—it is this which he desires somehow or other to put into outward form.

Language is an imperfect instrument; reality transcends speech, and even the child knows that the experience itself, the love he feels within, is greater than any expression of that love in words, or even in action.

Day after day, year after year, more and more the mystery of his mother's love is revealed to him; but can he ever know it in its entirety? Can any human plummet ever sound its depths? That which is known is always infinitely less than that which is there, in the mother's heart, waiting to be known. And as with the child's knowledge of his mother, so with our knowledge of God: the lesser cannot fully comprehend the greater, nor the human the Divine.

Not only when I am endeavouring to explain religious truths to a child, but also when I am striving to see them more clearly for myself, I need to bear in mind these principles, which, to me, appear fundamental. Belief grows out of experience; but experience can never be complete, and the expression in language of that experience is necessarily less complete than the experience itself. Doctrines are only groups of words—and therefore groups of symbols—hinting at, rather than defining, the realities for which they stand. This is true, not only of the halting speech in which we ourselves endeavour to express our own experience, but of the inspired language of the seers, the saints, the prophets of old.

Viewed in the light of these fundamental principles of all human knowledge, how shall we seek to help the child to begin to understand the doctrine of the Holy Trinity?

All doctrine rests ultimately upon experience; that much we know. What is the nature of the experience enshrined, then, in this particular doctrine, and how far can this experience be brought within the comprehension of the child? That is our task: first, to see for ourselves, and then, by a progressive analysis of his own experience, to help the child to see the spiritual truths, which men first felt and then strove to express, in this great mystery.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—three Persons in one God—what do these words mean *for us* in our own religious life?

They imply, firstly, a belief in God as the Parent-Source of all life—"Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things"—a belief in God as the Great Central Spirit of Love, whom Christ taught us to call "Our Father."

They imply, secondly, a belief in Christ as the "Word made flesh"; as the visible embodiment of all in the Father which could, in the flesh, be made known to us; as "very God of very God"—God, the Son.

They imply, thirdly, a belief in a mysterious Power by which men are guided, purified, trans-

formed; a Power, the quickening influence of which was felt so vividly by the disciples at Pentecost two thousand years ago that they told of "tongues of fire" coming down from Heaven; a Power which we have seen at work among men right down through the ages, which we ourselves can still know to-day—that is, a belief in the Holy Spirit—in God, the Holy Ghost.

And we believe in the Son as the *manifestation of the Father*; in the Holy Ghost as the Influence, the *Out-pouring of the Father*. Each is different from the other, yet neither can exist for us men and women without the other; and therefore these three must be One—three separate manifestations of One Spiritual Unity.*

"Three in One and One in Three"—a thought difficult to comprehend in its verbal expression yet not difficult to grasp when embodied in concrete form.

The rose is three in one, for the rose, as we handle it, with its shape, its colouring, etc., is but the embodiment of a life within, without which it could not be; while—from the heart of the rose—invisible, imponderable, yet all-pervading, arises a scent, which is neither the life nor its visible manifestation.

* The word "Persons" ("Three Persons in One God") is translated from the word "persona," which means "a mask." On this subject of the Holy Trinity read the sermons by Archdeacon Wilberforce in "Spiritual Consciousness."

We ourselves are three in one ; a mysterious unity, compounded of the life within, which we know to be our real self ; the outward form, in which that life is embodied ; and the influence, which radiates from us, consciously or unconsciously, whether for good or for ill. "The thought of one's own personality," writes Professor Jacks, "is as overmasteringly queer as the thought of God Almighty."

The doctrine of the "Holy Trinity" is an effort to express in words that which is beyond all expression ; the great Spiritual Reality, which is the mystery of mysteries, that God, Who is Infinite All-Being, incomprehensible and eternal, has yet lived among men, and dwells in our inmost souls.

How far can we, by a progressive analysis of the child's own experience, bring home to him some such conception as this ?

"Why," we might ask him, "do you believe that it will not hurt you to eat the ripe blackberries which you see growing on the hedges ? Why do you believe that it isn't good for you to eat too much cake ? Or why do you believe that if you dawdle about after you have got your feet wet you will catch a cold ?" First by one homely question, then by another, we might lead the child to see that he believes ripe blackberries are good, that too much cake is bad, that wet feet are

risky—just because he has known these things to be true, known them in his own experience.

“But,” we might continue, “do you not also believe that if you eat poisonous berries you will die, yet you do not know *that* as the result of your own experience. You believe that little Indian children have dark skins, yet you have never seen one of them. Why do you believe these things, which you have never known for yourself?” And gradually we could get from him the reply that he believes these things because he believes what other people tell him—other people who have either known for themselves or who have known others who themselves have known.

And then pressing the point still further, we might ask why he believes what other people tell when he is unable to prove for himself the truth of what they say? And the child will discover that it is because he knows, as *the result of his own experience*, that these people are worthy of his trust, so that he is again driven back upon his own experience as the original source of his belief.

And still there is one point more which it is well for him to grasp. Doesn't he sometimes do things which his mother has told him will do him harm, even though he believes what she tells him? Why does this happen? Because the things which he has found out for himself he remembers better than the things which he has only been told about

by other people. *Knowing about things* isn't the same as *knowing things*, for him or for any of us. That is an integral part of everybody's experience.

In some such way as this we can lead him, step by step, to a vivid realisation that *all his belief about the world in which he lives is the outcome of experience*, either of experience which he has himself enjoyed, or which he has accepted from another on whose honesty he relies; only first-hand experience is more real than that which is derived from other people.

This is the first point we need to make clear.

Is his knowledge of God—of an unseen Father—also the outcome of experience? This is the next question to which we want to help him to find an answer.

“The things you know about the world you live in are all known as the result of experience, your own experience or other people's, which you are ready to accept because you know and trust them. But how do you know about God, Whom no one has ever seen or ever can see—know that He loves and cares for you?” And the child, in all probability, will reply: “Because you told me of Him, teacher,” or “Because my mother told me about Him.” “But is there no way by which you can find out for yourself whether what your mother and I tell you about God is true? Can you know God for yourself, as well as knowing about Him

from other people?" And then, as the child is thinking, we can add: "How did you get to know for yourself your father and your mother, your brothers and sisters, your teachers and friends?" And we can get from him the reply that by talking with people, by doing things for them, by thinking about them, he gradually comes to know them. "The people you know best of all are those you live with," we can continue—"Is it possible for you to live with God?" And the child will tell us that when he remembers about God, obeys Him, trusts Him, prays to Him, he is living with God, and every day comes to know Him a little better. At first he needed to be told about God—the child knows that; but he also knows that knowing about God, through what other people tell him, is not the same to him as knowing God for himself, by living with Him.

All true knowledge of God comes, then, from experience of God, experience which he can gain for himself, if only he will; this is the second point which we need to make it clear to him.

"Then," we can continue, "when you read or hear about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—when you are told in the Sunday School or in Church that these are not three Gods, but one God—you are being told about something which has been known about God as the result of people's own experience.

What was this experience which men had long ago, which they knew first and told us about, but which we are able also to know for ourselves to-day, little children as well as grown folks? "And we can win from him, step by step, his own threefold knowledge of God.

He will tell us, first, of God as Creator—Maker of Heaven and earth and of all that is therein; of God as the Great Heart of Love, from Whom comes all our own power of loving; of God as his Heavenly Father, to Whom he prays each night. That is one way in which he knows of God—God as the Father—knows Him in his own intimate experience.

Then he will tell us next that Christ is God—Jesus, Who, when He lived on earth among men, was the Friend of little children, Who forgave the sinners, and healed the sick—and we can point out to him that it was because of people's actual *experience* of Jesus, because of what they heard Him say and saw Him do, because of the strange and inexpressible difference it made to them to be in His presence—that long ago they believed Jesus to be God; that ever since, millions of people have still believed it. *In their own experience*, men knew that to have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father, that God the Father had been revealed in God the Son. Just as in the child's own experience he can only reveal his inmost self by putting it into words and actions—that is, into

some concrete form—so God revealed Himself to us in the Person of the Son.

And God, the Holy Spirit? Has God in yet a third way entered into the child's experience?

"What makes you glad," we can ask, "glad, many a time, to give up to another something that you badly wanted yourself? What makes you tell the truth when you have done wrong and do the right when it is very hard?" And the child knows that there is "something inside him," some inner power, which makes him dissatisfied and sad within himself when he has done wrong—makes him willing to do right, even when it is against the grain. This too is God, the Holy Spirit of God, the "Holy Ghost." Where beauty is, where goodness is, there is God—the God within.

Within the stem of the water lily*—and a child can grasp this illustration—there is an elastic spiral coil, so adjusted as to give the lily power to rise or sink, as the water in which it grows increases or diminishes. In this way, it is able always to rest upon the very surface of the water, face to face with the life-giving sun. And within each one of us there is a Divine impulse upwards, giving us the power to rise above the pressure of circumstances and temptations, and to expand in the sunshine of God's liberty—only that which in the water lily is automatic needs in us to become

* *cf.* Sermon by Archdeacon Wilberforce, entitled "Don't Worry."

conscious. This Divine impulse within us is the Holy Spirit, the very breath of God.

God is found within. This is the experience of the smallest child who is striving to be good.

To the little child, then, God is even now revealed in a threefold manifestation—God the Father, God in Christ, God in us. But Christ was the Spirit of the Father, shown to us in the form of a man; God in us is the Spirit of the Father striving to express itself in and through us. These three are one. Direct the child's thought on to his own mother. He knows that Mother is not the body of Mother—Mother loves him, she plans for him and sympathises with him—but it is not only her lips which love when she kisses, or only her arms which love when she embraces him at bedtime; the thought, the love, the kindly consideration—*that* is really Mother, "the inner part of her that we don't understand," as the child puts it. Yet the body in which the "inner part" is housed while Mother is here upon earth, is Mother, too! "There's Mother!" he cries, and runs to greet her. "Who helps you," we ask, "to grow strong and brave, unselfish and truthful?" The child knows that his mother does—but how? And then, as the child ponders as to how it is that Mother can do all this for him, something else about her comes into his mind—a power, an influence, which, like God's Spirit within him, makes him long to do better,

sorry when he fails. Then "Mother" is three—first, a life, an "inner something," the real "Mother"; then a body, in and through which this inner life is revealed to him and to others; and, lastly, a power over others, which radiates from her as heat radiates from a fire. *Mother is "three and one."*

And then the child thinks of God—God as the Life behind all things, God as embodied in human forms, God as an unseen Influence—can he not, through his comprehension of the trinity of his mother, dimly comprehend the mystery of the Holy Trinity of God?

Should we leave the subject here? Or is it well somehow to suggest to the child that we are dealing with Divine realities, which are too great to be compassed by human understanding; that we are dealing with spiritual experiences, too inward to be embodied in human speech. This I should try to do even for the little child, for I believe that side by side with a conviction of God's inwardness, of His love and His protecting nearness in the Father and in Christ, there should be from the beginning also a sense of God's transcendence, a consciousness of Him as a great Reality beyond our power to name, to measure, or even to conceive.

Show the child an acorn; let him cut it open and find within it the germ of the tree. Can he

conceive a giant oak, with its huge trunk and spreading branches, its changing colouring, its millions of leaves, all contained in, and growing out of, that tiny white thread which is hidden in the substance of the nut? Let him cut open a crocus bulb and seek in that for the dainty, golden flower, the fine green leaves which, in the mysterious alchemy of Nature, are contained within it. Tell him of the wonder of the common fern, a blade of grass, a sprig of moss, and gradually deepen within him his consciousness of beauty and of mystery. The thought of God springs from the sense of wonder. Then remind the child that this world of ours, with all its wonders, is but one among a myriad of worlds; hint to him of the infinities of time, tell him of the infinitudes of space. What is the longest distance he himself has ever travelled? Perhaps three or four hundred miles, spending six or eight long hours in the train. And four hundred miles is as nothing when we measure spaces in the vastness of God's universe! Before we could reach the sun we should have to travel by an express train night and day for two hundred years; the light from the nearest fixed star takes over a thousand years to reach us, even though light travels nearly two hundred thousand times faster than the fastest train. We know these facts about the physical universe to be true because we can prove them true, but they are too big to be part of anybody's experience, however learned.

God is so great that no mind can compass and no tongue can tell of His majesty and His might, His infinite wisdom and His infinite love. "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can show forth all His praise?" Every day somebody is finding out some fresh truth; year after year, generation after generation, this will keep on happening; and not one of us can ever know all that there is of God and of God's universe, waiting to be known.

The physical universe alone, then, is beyond our power to grasp—that much will be clear even to the little child; but, behind the universe, we believe that there is a wise and purposive Love.

Can we ever put into words our experience of anything so wonderful, so personal, as Love? "How do you know," we might ask him, "that your mother loves you? You are quite sure of it, but why?" And as he tries to put into speech the words and the ways of his mother which to him are so sure a sign of her love, tries to tell you what she is like, more and more he will become conscious of the inadequacy of language. "I can't tell you why, but I know it—I know it in myself," he will say. "You would know it, too, if you could only see Mother."

"Then," we can add, "if you can't put into words what you know about your mother's love, is it likely that anyone can ever put into words what they know about the Love of God?"

It is *not* possible, and yet men try. Right down the ages people who have known and loved God have felt that they *must* strive to express what they believed they knew about Him, strive to express it even though they knew it to be inexpressible. And this doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as it is called—this statement about God as “Three in One”—is one of the most mysterious results of this earnest trying. And it is good to try—let the child find out for himself why. By simple questioning help him to see that if he never tried to put into words his experience of his mother’s love and goodness, he would tend many a time to lose sight of it. The very telling makes him notice and think about things in his mother that he would perhaps never notice or think about otherwise. Sometimes children take their mother’s love and goodness for granted, and often enough people take God’s goodness and wisdom for granted in just the same way.

So even though we can never really “tell,” it is a good thing to try to tell, because it deepens our knowledge, strengthens our love, and awakens our gratitude; only, we need always to remember that *truth is a much bigger thing than any words in which we try to express it*—for otherwise we might get satisfied with the words and forget the real things which lie behind them.

And with this thought, I should end: God is Infinite All-Being, but He has become visible to

us in Christ; God is the Great Central Heart of Love, the central Spirit of Righteousness, but wherever Love is, wherever Goodness is, in the world around us, there is God.

"I read of 'many mansions'
 Within the house divine;
 I need not go to find them,
 For *one of them is mine*;
 God lives in me and loves me,
 Who else could bring the day?
 Who spread the sleep upon me?
 Who give me hands to play?

And when I say, 'Our Father,'
 It seems so far to pray,
 To think of Heaven up yonder;
 I can but turn and say:
 'Dear Father, close beside me,
 I feel Thee dimly near,
 In every face that loves me,
 In each kind word I hear.'

He's the touch of mother's fingers,
 So full of love and care;
 He's the pleasantness of trying—
 The help inside the prayer.
 I do not understand it,
 But so it seems to be,
There always is that Other
Whom I but dimly see!"

"Thank you for your card, which I feel I must answer"—writes a correspondent. "As you say, 'not only ourselves but the children' should be conscious of 'mystery.' Poor children! and why mystery? Who can understand anything mysterious? And if there is a mystery, does it not always cause a kind of fear?"

"Why mystery? Who can understand anything mysterious?" Should we not rather say—here, in a universe wonderful beyond all imagining, can there, for our finite minds, be aught but mystery when we strive to lift the veil which hides what is from that which only appears?

For what do we mean by mystery, as we are accustomed to use the word? Not of necessity something dark and terrible, something to be feared, but rather that which is strange and baffling to the intellect or the imagination; that which is beyond our power to grasp or to understand. And how little of the world either around us or within us falls, after all, within our human comprehension!

What of things themselves? The common objects of our everyday life—earth, water, flowers, food, clothing, etc.? Is there any "mystery" in these? These things at least are familiar; we recognise them by their various qualities—earth as a substance possessing weight, of a certain colour and density, etc.; water as a liquid varying in temperature, having a certain appearance, a

certain taste and so on; by its scent, its shape, its colour, etc., we distinguish the rose from the carnation. But, as a matter of fact, *in itself* the earth is not brown and heavy; *in itself* water is neither hot nor cold; *in themselves* flowers have neither scent nor colour. It is we who are so made that we change waves of light into colours, the action of certain particles thrown off by "things" into scent, and so forth. Our current conception of the outer world as possessing *in itself* form, colour, etc., is all wrong, and the existence of qualities in "things" depends upon the *capacity of someone to perceive* these qualities.

"Our world," we are told, "is our senses in action. Not in things, but in us, are those qualities which, at the invitation of our senses, we attribute to things. . . . You must be here, for your world to have its red roses, its tasty food, its friendly voices. Things are 'bodies' bringing themselves to your notice, announcing their intentions, ringing you up on your nerves. You are the receiver of their wireless telegraphy."*

To most of us this is a strange and unaccustomed thought. But, in the presence of such a conception, is not all life wrapped in mystery? Our intellects can accept it when it is clearly presented to us, but is not the reality of the world somehow undermined thereby, at any rate until we grow more used to the idea? Does not the

* "I Wonder." By Stephen Paget.

apple we eat become strangely mysterious if we ponder on the fact that, in itself, it is neither sweet nor rosy, round nor hard; that it only appears to be so because we perceive it to be so?

The commonest objects around us are other than they seem—the objects whose existence we have taken for granted, upon whose permanence we have relied, and about which we had long since ceased to wonder, until this strange philosophy invested them with a fresh and unexpected interest.

And “matter”—the stuff of which all these so-called common objects are composed—is that any less wonderful?

Perhaps we have held that matter was composed of small particles, as, for instance, a brick of brick-dust; that these dust-particles were composed of particles smaller still, which could be, in their turn, still further split up, until, at last, we reached the conception of “atoms,” *i.e.*, of particles so small that they could not be cut in half. This was not, after all, so very mysterious; this we could comprehend with comparative ease.

But now we know that the atomic theory has been superseded; that even the atom can be divided! The one cause of all things is now stated in terms—not of atoms, which seemed to lie more nearly within our comprehension, but of “electricity. By this omnipresent force the universe is put together and is driven. Millions of

electrical units make an atom; millions of atoms make a particle of matter; millions of particles make some small thing, such as a grain of pollen, flower dust. . . . The earth is of a texture so fine that the very atoms are galvanic batteries, complex masses of electrical discharge."

And again we are in the presence of mystery. Truly "the outstanding feature of everything in this world is the staggering queerness of it." *Everywhere and at all times we are faced with that which it is beyond our power as human beings to comprehend.*

But what is the result? Not so much, I believe, the awakening of fear as the awakening of wonder and of reverence. So-called common things cease to be common when we discern the Infinite behind and within the finite; the mystery behind all outward seeming. "Wonder at the things before you," are words said to have been spoken by Christ Himself, and perhaps in a renaissance of wonder we should see a renaissance of religion.

"Follow the way of Wonder," writes Stephen Paget, in the book from which I have already quoted, "for it sets our faces towards wisdom. . . . Look which way you will, up and down the streets of the city of the mind, you find everywhere the use of Wonder. It helps you, if not to understand, yet to have some faint idea of the meaning of our being here. It does, I can hardly say how,

but it does lead us towards a sane, true, and proper vision of that adjustment between God and man, in which we live and move."

And to wonder is to recognise everywhere the presence of mystery.

All the great things that surround us are clothed in mystery—life, love, mind, even matter itself. This does not mean that we know nothing about them; it only means that the more we know, the more we realise how quickly that which we do know merges into that which we do not and cannot know, leaving us with a feeling of wonder and awe at the greatness of the universe and the limitations of our own knowledge.

How can Religion be an exception to this? How can we hope to explain man's relation to the Infinite when we know so little of the immediate things which surround us? Can the finite comprehend the Infinite? We train the child to live, we teach him to love, we develop his mind, we help him to acquire mastery over matter, but never with the idea of leading him to think that he can know or understand all about any of them; only in the hope that he may realise something of their immediate importance to him, and that, in their midst—wondering, reverencing—he may exercise his powers for good.

A child was trying to find out from his mother "how God and Jesus could be the same."

In answer, she suggested to him the analogy that his Christian name and his surname, though equally his own, were but two names for the one person.

How far was such a reply a wise one? she asks.

As such, the analogy seems to me good; though I, personally, should use it somewhat differently—not so much to suggest an *identity* between God and Jesus, an identity which is likely to confuse; as to suggest the unique *Sonship*, through which Jesus has become, to us, God.

Each one of us has two names—a surname which is determined for us by our parentage, and a Christian name which, when added to that surname, marks out our personal identity. If, as we know, our surname is one of which we have reason to be proud, the very possession of that name makes a certain definite call upon us to become worthy of it; and as we grow older and realise more of all that our inheritance entails, this call upon us becomes increasingly felt.

Since God, then, is our Father, does it not follow that we are all called upon to be His children? Is not the name “God”—in humility and reverence may I say it?—our surname to which, if we only choose to claim it, we are all alike entitled?

But if God is the Universal Father; then God is also the Father of Jesus Christ. As the child, here on earth, has his special name, Robin or Nor-

man ; so Jesus was the special name on earth by which the Christ was known.

But we are such imperfect children, and Jesus was the one perfect Child, revealing in His life, in a unique manner, the Father's nature ; sent by the unseen Father, that, seeing Him, we might indeed see His Very Self.

When, therefore, we speak of Christ as God, we are referring, not to an actual identity in which "God and Jesus are *the same*," but to a wondrous spiritual relationship—Christ is THE Son of God, our perfect Elder Brother ; Jesus-God.

CHAPTER V.

A CHILD'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT.

IN what form should we present to the child the doctrine of the Atonement? This is a question, the answer to which it is of the utmost importance each one of us should think out for ourselves, because—only too often—conceptions on this particular matter, uncritically given and uncritically received in childhood, are, in youth or early manhood, rejected as mythical, and with the rejection is involved a weakening of all religious faith.

A teacher writes: A girl of thirteen, after lessons on the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, asked:

“If Pilate and Judas had not yielded to temptation, how could Christ have died for us?”

What was the teaching about the Cross of Christ which had preceded this question? Had the child been taught that Christ had died for her “sins”—died that she “might be forgiven”—died that, by His Death, a reconciliation might be brought about between an angry God and sinful man, a reconciliation which could not otherwise have taken place? And if so, had she been taught that which she was capable of understanding?

Had she been taught by someone who, himself or herself, really understood the significance of what they had attempted to teach?

Doubts such as these are suggested at the start by the very form of the question, for the mere asking of such a question on the part of the child pre-supposes definite teaching, and at the same time surely a fundamental misconception of the doctrine of the Atonement.

Of sin, in itself, the very little child knows nothing. Some actions are permitted to him, others forbidden: that, at first, is all he knows. But as he grows older, he becomes capable of knowing more. Gradually he comes to understand that, behind prohibitions and commands, great principles lie; comes to see that wrong is ugly in itself; that right is beautiful. Gradually he realises that conduct rests upon something deeply rooted within him, which, in some strange and mysterious way, urges him on towards right-willing and right-doing; and so, always gradually, he comes to believe that, because of this inwardness of action, this upward tendency, it is in his power to do the right—with God's help—in spite of temptation, if only he wills to do it.

Surely, then, it is not of *sin* we want a child of thirteen to be most vividly aware, but of this inner upward striving; this divine, God-implanted impulse towards better things. It is the shining of the sun which creates the shadows; it is the

impulse towards right which makes the child conscious when he has done wrong. *And just as a plant grows instinctively towards the light, so the child, in all unconsciousness, grows towards goodness if only we give him the chance.*

"No matter how simply New Testament truths are expressed," writes Rev. H. Kingsmill Moore, "they cannot be apprehended readily by the mind of the child. Sin, repentance, salvation, and the other great facts which are associated with them, have different aspects for the adult and for the child. They must be seen with a child's eyes if their meaning is to be taught to a child."

I want frankly to strive to think out, from the child's own standpoint, this particular matter; and, in so doing, I do sincerely hope that I shall hurt no one. I am deeply conscious that this doctrine of the Atonement would not have been handed on from generation to generation, strengthening and uplifting, did it not enshrine some great truth, some deep experience of the individual human soul. Yet, in the somewhat crude forms in which it is still presented to the child—in much of our class teaching and many of our most familiar hymns—can we ourselves reconcile it with our knowledge of God as revealed in Christ Jesus? Can we easily justify it to the child as loving, or even as just?

What, then, is the spiritual experience embodied for us in this particular belief, which has

persisted from age to age? And how far can we help the child to enter into it with us? In what light do we view it when—putting our own ideas for the time being aside—we strive to look out upon life with the simplicity, the innate sensitiveness, the response of the child?

It is an educational truism that we can only lead the child on to new knowledge along the lines of the knowledge which he already possesses—how far are we able, through his knowledge of that which is involved in human love, to glean for him some faint conception of the meaning and the mystery of the Divine Love?

By this effort to see with the eyes of the child, we shall ourselves gain in clearness of perception: of that I am sure. For the judgment of a child is one of the best tests of moral and spiritual truth. We older folk tend all unconsciously to cloud the clearness of our vision by custom or prejudice, by intellectual subtleties; the child, with his open heart and mind, his direct and simple outlook, is nearer than we are to the Kingdom of Heaven. And is it not a fact—a fact which is continually borne in upon us in our teaching of children—that those things which are eternally true are, for the most part, extraordinarily simple and easy to grasp, though naturally not easy to explain?

What, then, viewed from the child's standpoint, is the simple lesson of the Cross which it is in our power to impart?

Is not the first thing which we realise about Love, as we look out upon life, its power, through suffering, to redeem?

Ronald was the "black sheep" of his family. Continually fresh punishments were devised for him by his parents in the hope of effecting an improvement; but all to no avail. As a matter of fact, punishment only seemed to make him worse. One day, for instance, when for some misdemeanour he was sent to bed, he tore the sheets into ribbons and broke all in the room he could lay his hands upon! But hardened sinner though he was, he was the soul of honesty; and his heart was tender.

One day, a sister a few years younger than himself broke a valuable piece of china; and fearing to confess to her mother, she made a confidant of her scapegrace brother. As a result of his persuasion, she confessed her fault; and, greatly to her surprise, she was not punished; she was not even scolded! Her mother only told her that she was very, very sorry—the more so as the broken china could never be replaced. Delighted at her escape, she ran to tell her brother all about it, expecting him to be equally pleased with herself! "Oh, Molly, how dreadful!" was the lad's only comment—he was thirteen years old at the time—"Did you cry? I would rather have been punished a thousand times than see Mother sorry like that. I couldn't bear that at all."

The so-called "black sheep" had a very tender heart, hidden away. Had his parents only shown him their love in a way which he could understand, Love would have redeemed him. Love has power when all else fails; and until the child has experienced human love, there is nothing *known* in his life by which we can interpret to him the *unknown* in this great and abiding mystery of the Atonement.

"It is only through our mysterious human relationships," writes the author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays," "through the love and tenderness and purity of mothers, and sisters and wives, through the strength and courage and wisdom of fathers, and mothers, and teachers, that we can come to the knowledge of Him, in Whom alone the love, and the tenderness, and the purity, and the strength, and the courage, and the wisdom of all these dwell for ever in perfect fullness."

If the child, in his relationship with others, has experienced the love of a good mother, father, teacher or friend, who suffers and forgives—then he can begin to understand, from his own inner experience, the essential truth of the Atonement; for the doctrine of the Atonement is the most triumphant expression of the truth about Love.

What, then, is this truth? The child herself can tell us.

When you do something very wrong, lassie—

(we can ask her)—when, forgetting what is right, you are perhaps cruel or selfish or afraid to own up to a fault, perhaps you tell a lie—who do you think is the most troubled about it, you yourself or your mother, who loves you, and who, because of her great love, cares so much that you should always do the right? Even when, to help you to understand and to remember, she punishes you for a fault, who suffers most from the punishment, you or your mother?

And the child should know (will know, if it be a fact) that the mother, who has done no wrong, but who loves the little wrongdoer, it is she who suffers, far more than the wrongdoer herself.

This is the first great truth even about human love.

Then we can continue. When your mother is so sorry at your wrongdoing, lassie, what difference does that make to you? Don't you feel sorrier, just because you see your mother so sorry? Does it not make you long, with God's help, never to grieve your mother in the same way again, if you can possibly manage it? And the child knows that it is so.

Then can she not understand that, in and through her mother's suffering, she is herself "saved" from further wrongdoing; made a better little person, more of one mind with her mother in matters of right and wrong; and, through that

mother, who is to her at once a sign and a symbol of God here on earth, more *at one* with God Himself?

This is the second great truth, even about human love.

But if, in her own experience, she has known that one who has done wrong is able, through the sacrifice borne by another, to be brought into closer union with God, should it be hard for her to grasp the further thought of the world-wide possibilities which lie hidden in the sacrifice of such an one as Christ—Christ, whose power of loving was so great that not only the wrongdoing of His nearest and dearest caused Him pain, but the wrongdoing of the whole world?

Such a thought, springing immediately out of her own most intimate experience, is not hard for the child to grasp. Yet is it not the expression, in the simple language of childhood, of the doctrine which we are considering, that of the AT-ONE-MENT between the will of man and the will of God?

For the grown person a fuller interpretation is both necessary and possible; but for the child, to begin with, is not this simple fact of the power of Love, through suffering, to AT-ONE, all that we need? Is not the meaning and purpose of life ever more fully revealed to the child in her mother's loving sacrifice? And is it not through such a

revelation as this, that, gradually and increasingly, she can interpret, and enter into, Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross?

Perhaps, if the child had been so taught, she would never have asked the question:—

"If Judas and Pilate had not yielded to temptation, how could Christ have died for us?"

But if the question were asked, along what lines should we frame a reply?

Should we not need to make clear, first of all, that the part played by Judas and Pilate was only secondary to that played by the priests—the priests, who fiercely resented Christ's claim to be the long-expected Messiah; whose whole attitude towards life stood out in entire contrast to that of Jesus. So intense was their hatred that it was inevitable, in a very short time, that He should be called upon to choose between the surrender of His mission—and death—even death upon the Cross. The will of the Son was at one with the will of the Father, and He therefore *chose* to die. "My meat," He said, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me." "I lay down My life, and no man taketh it from Me."

And then, can we convey to the child any idea of the ultimate meaning of that supreme sacrifice? Can we help her to see how, through the Cross, men have been, and still are, "saved" from sin, "at-oned" with God?

This has been the object of this chapter. The Mystery of the Atonement is rooted and grounded in Love, infinite and abiding, ever-deepening. And is it not through a deeper appreciation of the meaning and the purpose of love in life that we all, grown folk and children too, begin to hear faint whispers from the Eternal, and hearing, see the Divine in the human, the human in the Divine?

And then—why then we first *begin* to understand what the Atonement means.

“It seems to me,” a teacher writes, “that Christ’s At-one-ment did not consist merely in His death upon the Cross, but in His life before and after; that His life on earth and His Church’s present work are all part of one great Divine plan to make men ‘at one’ with the Infinite, and that this began at the beginning of all time and goes on throughout eternity. And this brings me to the thought of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which has often worried me, but I seem to be able to explain it a little to myself in this way:—Throughout the ages there has been God, the Father, creating and caring for His own—then for thirty-three years the Spirit of God took the form of a Man, and in the person of Jesus Christ (Son of God and Son of Man) God the Son dwelt on earth to draw men to Him by His perfect Life, but more so, even, by His wonderful Death and

Resurrection—and then, in the same form, He disappeared from their sight, but still remained near them, though invisible, and still remains as God the Holy Ghost, working in the minds and hearts of His people. But can children enter into this thought at all? Can they be expected to think of God, Christ and the Comforter as one Spirit—not three persons? Also, it seems to me that Christ's At-one-ment did not consist merely in His death upon the cross, but in His life before and after."

It is an educational truism which, in recent chapters, again and again, I have taken for granted that only by means of the known, can we attain to knowledge of the unknown. Until, therefore, the meaning and the purpose of human love have been revealed, we cannot hope to enter into the mystery of the Divine love; and only in so far as we have begun to understand the power to redeem which we ourselves possess, and the men and women round about us, can we even begin to understand the mystery of the redeeming power of God. *Begin* to understand, for the Atonement is a divine mystery, which grows more, and not less, amazing as we dwell upon it; begin to *understand*, for we can only truly understand that in which we ourselves take some part. And not once, but many times in our lives, we must have known what it means, through love, to at-one or to be at-oned. Out of the heart of each person's most intimate experi-

ence, there arises a suggestion—a suggestion pregnant with meaning—as to the *purpose* of this suffering, atoning Love, and so far I have dealt only with this aspect of the subject.

But Love can and does at-one, apart from suffering; for the power to inspire and to uplift, which is of the very essence of love, in and by itself, redeems from Sin.

Read Jerome K. Jerome's story, "The Stranger in the Fourth Floor Back," in this connection, and in an extraordinarily vivid and concrete form, you will realise what I mean. In the presence of the Stranger, the narrow, stunted, twisted lives of the men and women in that second-rate boarding house were transformed into something new and strangely beautiful—transformed (at-oned with the Infinite) not by anything which the Stranger did or suffered, but simply by His being what He was. For the Stranger, because He loved, believed; and to that belief one and all instinctively responded.

"Even when there are no signs of goodness or ability"—writes Dr. Sophie Bryant, giving a practical rule for the guidance of those called upon to deal with so-called "difficult" children—"still believe in both; no-one is so hopelessly bad or hopelessly stupid that your faith will not prove in itself a cause of cure."

Belief kindles effort; love awakens love—and, in the presence of a believing love, it becomes

natural to us to be good. This the veriest child knows in his experience, though he could not explain it, even to himself. "I *want* to be good when I'm with Nannie—somehow or other," wondered four-year-old Ronald; but those who knew Nannie did not wonder, they understood.

"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me"—the Master said once. "Draw *all* men" ? How? Because the power of Infinite Love by itself uplifts, compels, at-ones. The truth of the Atonement finds its complete, its supreme and triumphant expression in the Death upon the Cross, but it is enshrined in every detail of Christ's Life.

And "beholding we are transformed with the same image"; through Love, saved from sin, by being saved from sinning.

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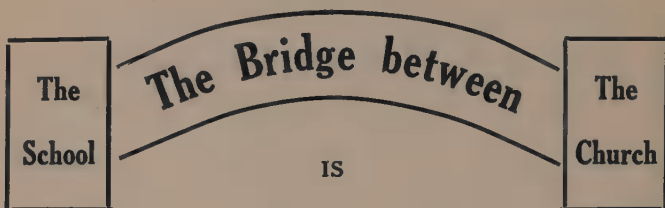
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